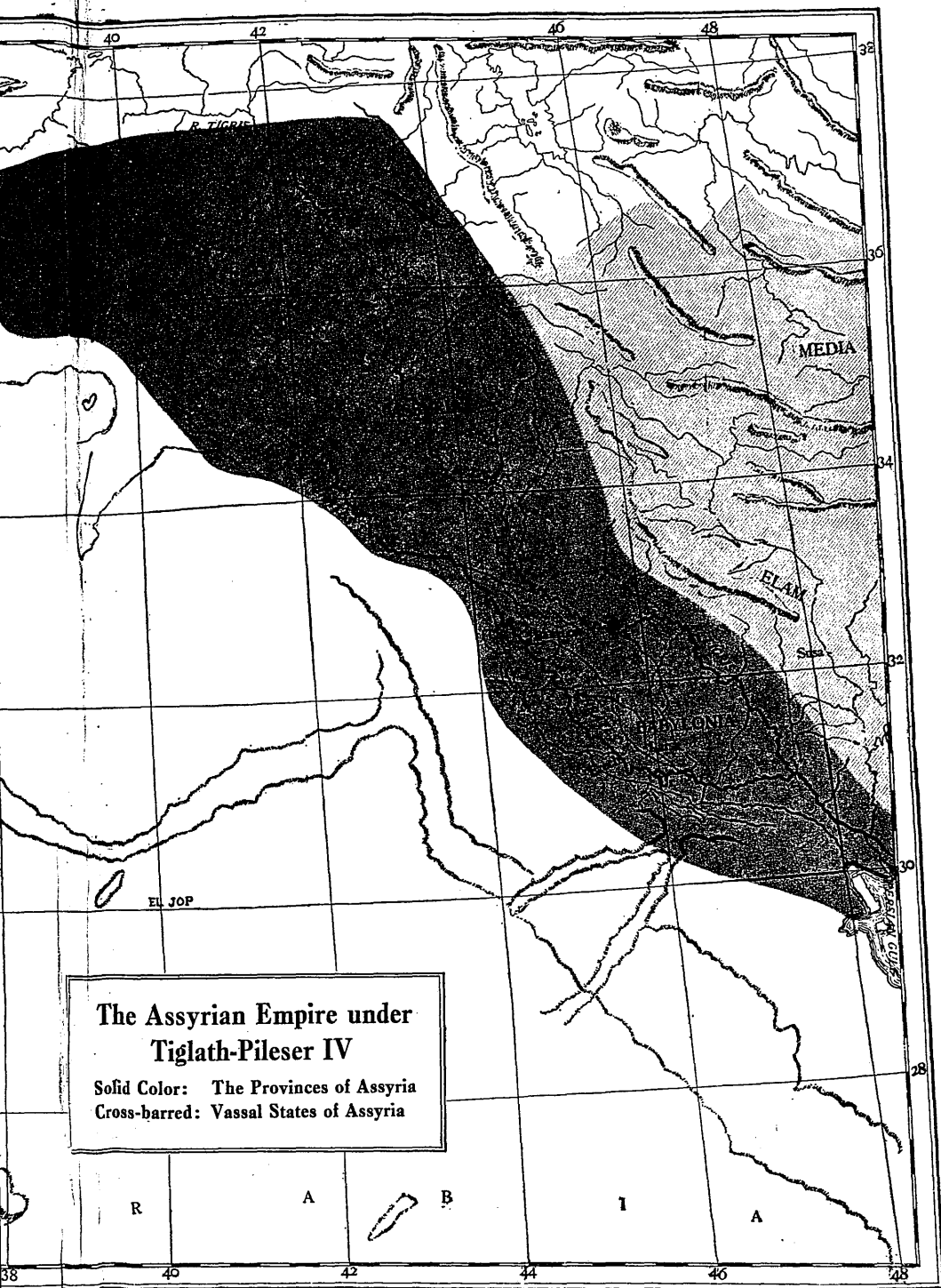
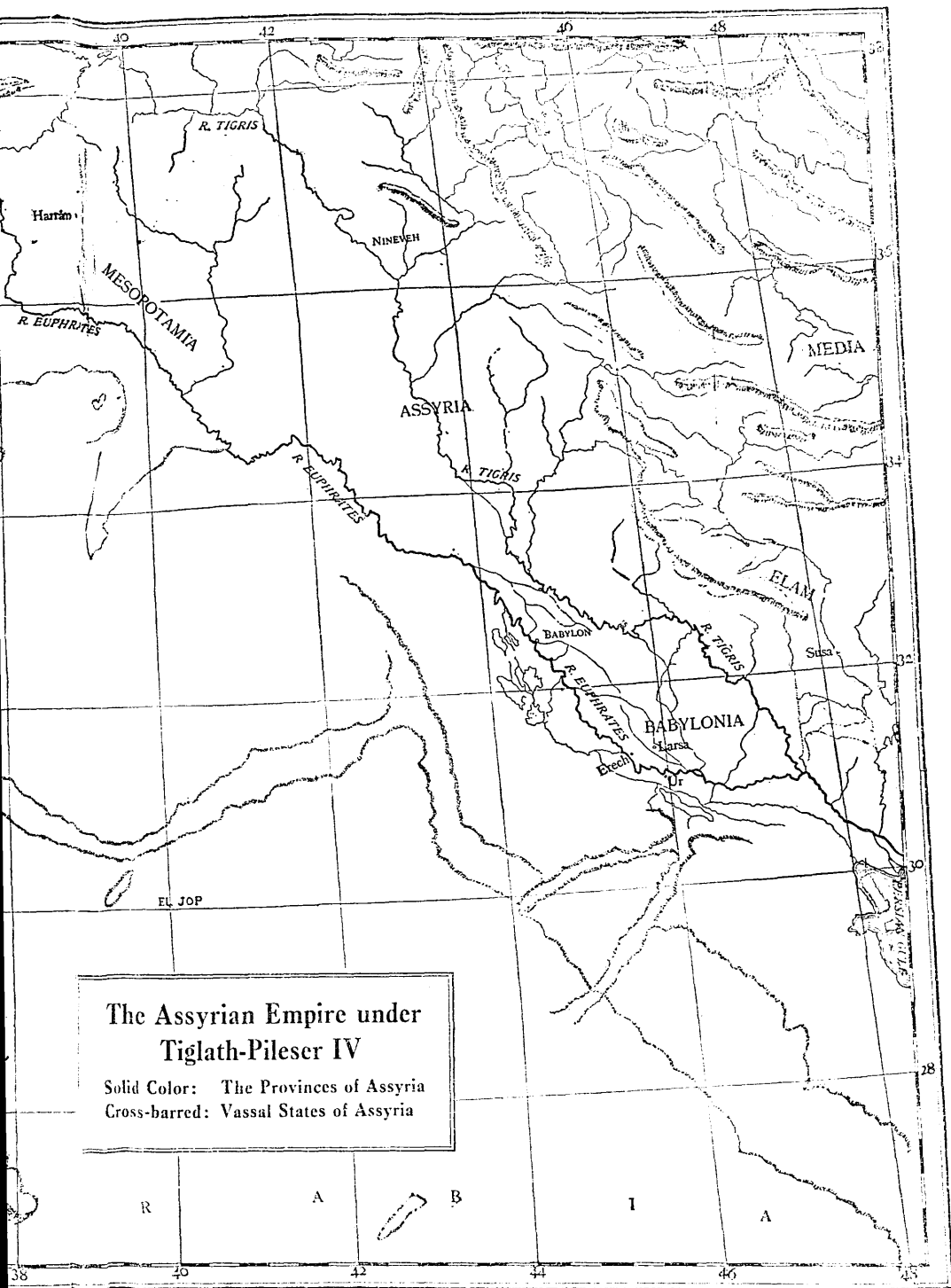










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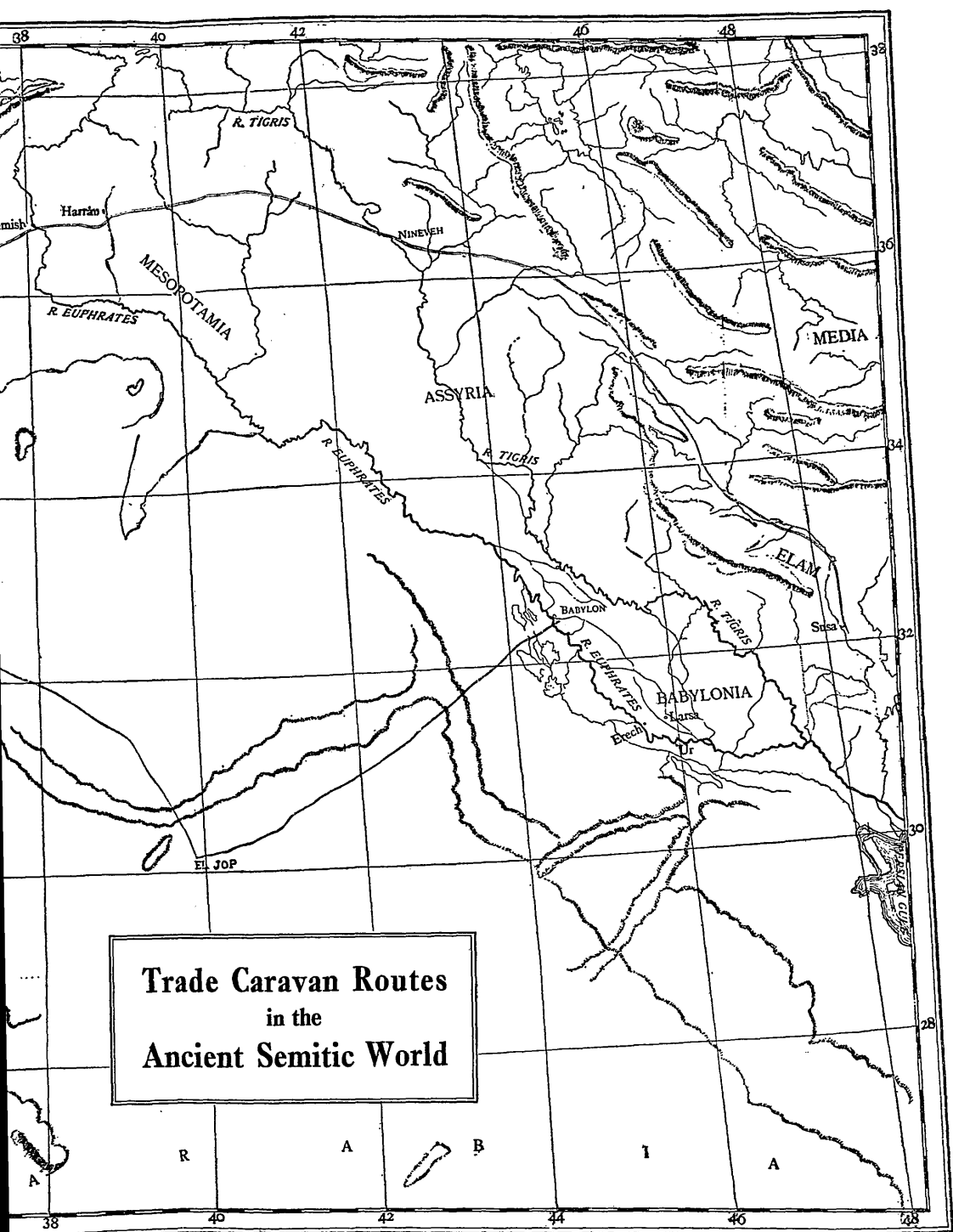
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MAKING THE BIBLE LIVE

BY

GEORGIA L. CHAMBERLIN

*Author of "The Hebrew Prophets," "An Introduction to the Bible
for Teachers of Children," "Child Religion in Song and Story"
(2 vols.); Contributing Editor of American Institute of Sacred
Literature Studies (The University of Chicago)*



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

THE Bible was once a central resource in the civilization of our country. It was deemed above comparison with any other book. It was conspicuous in every home. Its word was magic. In most of us of mature years lingers the memory of a family Bible containing lists of births and deaths, those sacred events of family life which only a Bible was worthy to record. Some of us recall the leisurely, daily, morning reading by the assembled family, followed by prayer or hymn, a program of preparation for the day as necessary as dressing one's self or eating one's breakfast. And we felt that not only was every word of the Bible "true as Gospel" but that it was meant for us, even addressed to us. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Perezites were no strangers, and we were against them because they were the enemies of the people of God; and, as for the red-handed Philistines, their name was anathema.

Then suddenly we were grown up. Everything had changed. The Bible had vanished from its central place. Some people even scoffed at it as old-fashioned and out of date. Sunday-school teachers and very religious people read it as a duty, ministers chose texts from it, and most of the rest of the people forgot about it, for they now had vast numbers of books, magazines, newspapers, movies, the radio—and no time. The Bible, except by the few, was laid on the shelf.

Then in some marvelous way it was rediscovered. Scholars who had explored it, seeing in it archeology, his-

tory, literature, and religious philosophy, found a voice and a hearing. Their findings were subjected to tests of accuracy, and their truth proven by experience. As a consequence, the Bible is returning to power. Tools for its understanding have been multiplied, such as fresh translations from newly discovered manuscripts, modern literary formats, a variety of editions, and copious biblical introductions. Always a best seller, the reasons for its popularity have changed. No longer do the tyrannical claims of religion compel its use, but fascinating history, the growth of great ideas, the portrayal of great personalities, the songs and prayers of the ages, and, above all, its mystic and convincing flavor of God invite us to enjoy it and to use it as a great vehicle of religious emotion, inspiration, and instruction.

At least a part of the task of every parent or teacher is to show youth how to penetrate to the heart of this rich storehouse and to enjoy it. While this volume, therefore, is intended for the general reader who uses the Bible for his own enjoyment and instruction, it is meant especially to appeal to that particular "general reader" who, as parent or teacher, is concerned with the training of youth, and for him or her a few special suggestions are appended at the close of each chapter and sometimes appear in the text.

The book will be read most successfully by those who at once and persistently pass from its pages to further investigation of the particular biblical book which is under consideration. Lack of space rendered it impossible to include more than brief selections, and one will find his interest satisfied only with further readings from the text. It is hoped that a modern translation will be used. The selections are taken, for the sake of uniformity and clearness,

from the American Translation of the Bible.¹ Other translations are named in the Books for Reference on page 371. Those who prefer to use the King James Version will find its contents more enjoyable in the light of the facts contained in these chapters.

The author, while wholly indebted to others for the factual contents of the various chapters, has endeavored to make a few of the more elementary results of the work of technical writers easily available and more realistic by combining historical data, portions of text, theological and ethical inferences, and suggestions for educational use.

In order to bring the influence of biblical personalities and their relation to God to bear upon questions of the life of today, these personalities have been focalized. It is hoped that the brief suggestions for educational use will lead some to original experimentation with the various characters and events. But beyond all else there is the aim to attract the attention of readers of the book to a creative and constantly growing philosophy of life, God-centered as well as man-centered—a series of links in a chain which will, to the end of time, be growing and incomplete.

It is by no means to be inferred that there are not other valuable methods of approaching the study of the Bible, but rather that one who is familiar with the historical and literary approach has a background which will enrich his appreciation, whatever may be his immediate purpose in using the Bible.

¹J. M. P. Smith and E. J. Goodspeed (eds.), *The Bible: An American Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), with the permission of the editors and the publishers.

CHAPTER II

PIONEERING YEARS: VICTORIES AND ADVENTURES OF EARLY HEROES

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

WE SHALL explore the Book of Judges first because it illustrates in an easily recognizable way the dual character of the biblical literature—that is, the early core plus the accretions of time, as literature or events came to be used by later writers to emphasize religious ideals of their own day.

Our sympathetic interest in the people and their problems—both the writers and the people about whom they wrote—is of primary importance. This gained, we shall be able to discover what this book of the Bible may contribute to our own religious thinking and how it may be useful in religious education.

The first two chapters of the Book of Judges present a summary of what appears to be the complete capture of the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Probably the real history of the conquest is nowhere completely recorded. This is a summary through which a writer, hundreds of years later, sought to impress an idealized point of view, not primarily for the sake of historical accuracy but as a religious interpretation of past tradition. The remainder of the book consists of separate episodes, which the Hebrews loved to relate, stories of heroes of very ancient times, coming from different sections of the land and at widely separated intervals of time, all that remain to us of numbers of such glorious tales.

These stories are already well known, even to boys and girls. But so miscellaneous and varied have been the teachings drawn from them, and so confused the story with its interpretation, first by the biblical writer and then by the modern teacher, that many refusing to accept the idea of God which they represent have ignored the real significance of the stories in the development of Hebrew life and experience. These stories of fighting at desperate odds for new territory present a conflict not yet outmoded in human history. The Hebrews believed that this particular land was destined to be theirs by the God who had led them to it through centuries of nomadic wanderings. Its capture was to them a just seizure of rights. Of course, they must fight; and, of course, in later centuries their defeats were interpreted by religious leaders as due to the anger of God, and their successes to his approval. When still later, therefore, an unknown editor was seeking to use these events to point his religious message, in the simplicity of his literary experience he carefully inserted the stories in a sort of religious framework in which he reveals his interpretation of the events. "So the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, in that they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and Ashtarts. Then the anger of the Lord blazed against Israel, so that he sold them into the power of the ———, and the Israelites were subject to ——— for ——— years. Then the Israelites cried to the Lord, and the Lord raised up a savior for the Israelites to save them." The author follows with an old story of battle and deliverance, under an ancient champion, inspired by the spirit of the Lord. He adds uniformly, "And the land enjoyed security for forty years." We prefer to uncover the characters for ourselves if we can and to form our own philosophy of history.

Some of the stories depict only treachery, primitive social conditions, and crude morals. These interest us as giving a clearer picture of the times. We note as we read all those things which reveal customs of the people, means of livelihood, ideals of family life, religious practices and ideas, weapons with which the people fought, clan spirit, and any other elements which help us to visualize groups or individuals. We shall be surprised, no doubt, at much action which is represented as being acceptable to God, as well as at strange conduct and attitudes which are attributed to him. These are often contrary to our modern conception of a just and loving God. We recognize them as qualities belonging to the times. One would be tempted to catalogue the characteristics of the society so vividly pictured, as an aid in visualizing the life of the Hebrews continuously, were it not for the fact that these customs and ideas were constantly changing.

A topographical map will help us further to fill in the background of the life in the villages, the location and the shelter of the mountainous regions, the need of streams, the proximity of barren wastes, and the mounting desire of the Hebrew tribes to encroach upon the favored sections already occupied by the inhabitants of the country. The topography of a land has much to do with its literature, especially in primitive times, when each separate group was absorbed in its own immediate prosperity. Land, homes, agriculture, stock-raising, and the production of its own food and clothing were the primary interests of a tribe.¹

¹ Palestine, during a portion of this period, was dominated by the Egyptians but adopted the language and customs of the earlier invaders, the Arameans of Mesopotamian stock, rather than those of the Egyptians.

The Book of Joshua also presents stories from this period, but they are so highly colored by the theology of a later period that they are not so easily

Our first interesting story is that of a deliverance from the Canaanite, Sisera, under the guidance of a woman, Deborah, called a prophetess (one who speaks for God), living in the north country among the hills. This story is twicetold, in prose in chapter 4 and again in the poem of chapter 5. Doubtless the poem is the earlier. It is said to be the earliest full poem of Hebrew literature. The facts in the two chapters do not exactly coincide. In the prose story statements in regard to the part which God played in the victory, as well as in the preparation for the battle, are very literal. A more adequate picture can be constructed by the use of both the prose and the poetry.

Space does not permit us to give this story in detail, but a very simple picture of the condition of the Hebrews, struggling along in the rude life of the hills, and looking with longing at the possibilities of profit and ease to be derived from possession of the plains, coupled with their firm conviction that all these they were destined by God himself to possess, gives us the necessary background. Deborah, whose fine judgment and firm decision may well furnish inspiration for today, stands in this story in the position of the ancient oracle to whom people went with all their problems, confident that they would receive help. Deborah has decided that her people can no longer endure restriction to the hills. She believes that they are strong enough to take the tempting plain below. She summons the man who seems to her best fitted to lead an uprising.

The poem (chap. 5) suggests to us how the call went out to all the surrounding tribes, some of whom came valiantly,

separated from it. Read with experience of the historical approach, they can, however, be appreciated and used with modifications. All these stories were probably preceded by a campaign under Joshua many years past, but quite limited in scope.

and others refused, preferring to continue undisturbed in their several sections of the country. The place of the battle is easily located on a map, by the river Kishon, and one has little difficulty in picturing the forces of Israel from the north, and the forces of the Canaanites from the fertile valleys, to the south, led by Sisera, fighting for protection from the insistent pressure of the Hebrews into those desirable regions. The battle turns on a great storm, described only in the poem. What threatens to be a victory for Sisera becomes a rout, because his superior war chariots are mired by the quick rising of the river and the flooding of the plains. And many of his followers were possibly drowned in their attempt to cross the swollen river over the dry bed of which they had come. The Hebrews, not thus encumbered, because fighting on foot, won an easy victory which is completed when a woman, Jael, slightly related in blood to the Hebrews, treacherously and picturesquely makes an end of the fleeing Sisera, who seeks refuge in her tent.

It is a barbaric story, in which the Hebrews are always right, and their enemies always wrong. To them this storm was an instrument of the Lord on behalf of his people. Standards of right and wrong in any age are closely related to the times in which we find them. It is essential that we remember this in our use of the Bible; for one can find in its pages, approved by the Lord, as the writer thought, almost any sort of conduct which the people at different periods of Hebrew history wished to practice. No one can think through the story of this event as pictured in the two different accounts, letting himself come under the spell of the ancient Deborah, without a thrill as he sees the coming-together of the tribes in a grand effort to throw off the domination of the Canaanites. Even the treachery of Jael

is not condemned. We find ourselves echoing the exultation of the last lines added by a later hand, "Thus may all thy enemies perish, O Lord; but let thy friends be like the rising of the sun in his might."

One does not look in an old battle ode of perhaps twelve hundred years before Christ for modern ethics. When we seek there, however, for deeply religious people, we find them. The character of Deborah is dignified, confident, and inspiring, with the poise that we covet for modern feminine leadership. Jael reminds us of the average, impetuous, loyal woman of today who violates a sanction of society in order to achieve what she believes to be a greater purpose. To cultivate the appreciation of the loyalty, zeal, and triumph which this old poem breathes is not to accept as admirable the barbarities which it also portrays. We are not going back three thousand years for literal examples. But we must not be deprived of the thrill that comes from an appreciation of this bit of ancient literature and its occasion. We should use the poem rather than the prose accounts where we can. In fact, the story cannot be understood without the poem, for it is only in it that we discover what it was that "discomfited" Sisera and his army.

Turning a page of our Bibles, we come to the story of Gideon, which every child has heard and which we must pack full of "local color" if we would interest age or youth today. We shall give the story rather fully not as a model to be learned and presented but simply as a detailed example of what can be done in revivifying one of these stories from the Book of Judges, notwithstanding the fact that it teems with theological ideas which are not in harmony with those more modern conceptions which one may be expected to hold.

In a sentence, stripping away all details, we see a young

man of Israel moved by a passion to save his people from a galling oppression that was threatening to stamp out their lives, summoning to his assistance every possible agency of which he is aware, and, confident that his cause is righteous and that his God will be with him, throwing all the energy of his keen brain, his qualities of leadership, and his enthusiasm into a task which he gloriously accomplished; then in a moment of personal triumph modestly attributing the victory to God, whose work he believes he has been doing. If we read that sentence again thoughtfully, we will see that such a man in our own day would be regarded as a hero and altogether admirable, an inspiration to noble living. Now the question is, can we read this story in such a way that this man will appear, or is he hopelessly buried in the accretions of the past? Let us try.

When the Hebrew people, after long wandering in the desert, working westward entered the land of Palestine, they came in straggling groups at different times and settled in different parts of the country according to their liking or according to the possibility of obtaining a foothold. They were inspired, however, by one great idea which they had inherited from their ancestors of generations back. They believed that it was their destiny to live in this land.

There were already in the land cities of size and strength, broad pastures owned by the Canaanites, and strongholds in the hills and the valleys that would require hard fighting should they undertake to possess them. As a matter of fact, they made little stir about coming into this region, but, as they could, located themselves in protected places in the hills where there were woods and caves and little streams. For the most part they let the cities alone, trading in them for tools and such clothing and provisions as they could not secure for themselves. Their pasture lands were very small, their flocks few in number, their homes simple and rude.

But as the years passed and these little colonies found themselves growing in numbers and desiring more land, the old inhabitants of their districts became alarmed and, with superior numbers, undertook to control the Hebrew invaders and to keep them from developing and spread-

ing out into larger territory. They even enslaved Hebrew families and refused to sell them food. In time, as the Hebrew colonies became larger still, and more ambitious, oppression became more rigorous, and it seemed to the little tribes as if they were fast becoming slaves.

One day, in the Hebrew village of Ophrah, at the head of the valley, a stalwart young man, Gideon, the son of Joash, was hiding in the wine press beating out wheat. He was afraid to do this very necessary bit of work in the open lest some of the Midianites from the Great Plain, who were the most recent oppressors of his people, should suddenly appear. He felt humiliated and ashamed as he looked at his strong hands and his great body and felt his helplessness. The Midianites had been so menacing in their attacks upon the tribe to which Gideon belonged that many of his people had been forced to make for themselves homes in the dens and caves of the mountains. Whenever they had sown their seed and good crops had been ready to reap, the Midianites had come and in a night carried their harvest away. These thieving enemies camped within sight with swift camels, and after their raids the Hebrews were left with no food for themselves, their sheep, their oxen, or their asses to live upon, and with no possibility of cultivating the ground. All this was in Gideon's mind as he beat away at the wheat in the wine press, and he questioned bitterly, "If the Lord is wise, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonderful deeds which our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Was it not out of Egypt that the Lord brought us, and now he has assuredly cast us off, and has delivered us to the power of Midian.' " But as he thought of himself and of the young men of his tribe he resolved that something must be done. Was he not able to fight? Had he not tried his strength in the harvest and with wild beasts in the thicket? Should he and his fellows tamely submit? As he thought after this manner it seemed to him that God himself was saying to him, "Go in this strength of yours, and save Israel from the power of Midian. I am sending you."

Then came doubts. "How can I do this thing? I am of a weak clan and I am not even great in my father's family." But again it seemed to him that God was saying, "You will destroy Midian. I will be with you." Could he do it and how?

It was a custom in the family of Gideon, whenever some great crisis arose, to offer a sacrifice. It was their way of praying. Here was a great decision to be made, and naturally Gideon determined to make a sacrifice. He prepared a kid and unleavened cakes of flour and brought them

out to the rock under the sacred tree, the usual place of the family sacrifice, and placed them on it. Just what happened we do not know, but long years afterward, in telling this story, people said that fire from heaven burnt up the sacrifice under the touch of an angel and that the angel assured Gideon that God would be with him. At all events, Gideon was filled with courage to carry out what seemed to him the command of the Lord.

Now there was in the center of the village an altar for the worship of Baal, which was the common name for some of the gods of the Canaanites, and no doubt some of the Hebrew villagers offered sacrifices to their Lord upon it. But to Gideon this altar represented another god. Since he was depending upon the Lord to help him in his plan, he reasoned that he must get rid of this other god so that all those whom he might call to his aid should be at one in their worship, and that the Lord might not be angry at any of them for worshipping another god. In the middle of that night, therefore, he took one of the choicest of his father's cattle and with a group of young men of his father's household who were ready for something daring, he went quietly, so as not to arouse the village, to the altar of Baal. Together they tore it down, cut down the sacred pole that was beside it, and upon another altar which they quickly constructed from the remains of the old one they offered to the Lord the choice animal which had been brought. By so doing they felt sure that they had destroyed the power of Baal and had found favor with God. In the morning when the townsmen arose they saw the old altar wrecked, the sacred pole lying flat, and the remains of the sacrifice still smoking. They said, "Who has done this deed?" After search and inquiry the rumor went about that Gideon, the son of Joash, had done it. Then the townsmen said to Joash, "Bring out your son that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal and has cut down the sacred pole which was beside it." But Joash, Gideon's father, said to the crowd, "If Baal is a god, let him take his own part. Why did he let his altar be torn down?" They could not answer, and Gideon was spared.

After this many days of doubt and discouragement passed. What could he do next? Would the people listen to a call to war from him? To try it out, Gideon sent messengers to summon the tribes about, and they came and joined their forces, camping in the valleys. There were many of them. They seemed eager to undertake the campaign. But was he the right leader for them? There is an old story that pictures his doubt by saying that he tried to test the question as to whether God would

really be with him in this enterprise. One day he said to God, "If thou art really going to save Israel by my power as thou hast declared, see, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing-floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, while it is dry upon the ground, I will know that thou wilt save Israel by my power as thou hast declared." And so it happened. When he rose early next morning and re-entered the place, he squeezed in dew out of the fleece a bowl full of water. But he was not yet satisfied. Again he spoke, "Let not thine anger blaze against me that I may speak just once more. Let me make one more test with the fleece. Pray let it be dry on the fleece only but on all the ground let there be dew." And it was so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but on the ground there was dew.

As Gideon's courage increased, he found himself ready for the great adventure. People from the tribes about had been coming steadily for days and days. They seemed numberless. But as he looked out upon them he felt a sense of his own inability to handle such a vast crowd of people, and a lack of confidence in their skill as warriors, or in their faithfulness to the cause. He said to himself, "There are too many. I cannot work with them. I must weed them out." So he sent his messengers to proclaim in the hearing of all the people, "Whoever is afraid and timid must go home." And day by day he watched crowds going home. Still there were too many left, not a sufficient number to conquer the Midianites by their superior numbers, and too many to carry out any strategic program. Again Gideon thought. One day as he was watching them drink by the waterside an inspiration came to him. He saw that in the very manner in which they drank, some stepping quickly and lapping the water up with speed and energy, others kneeling in a leisurely way, the character of these men was indicated. He could tell which were strong and eager and likely to be good fighters and quick to understand what he desired. So he carefully selected the promising men from the rest and sent all those that remained to their homes.

What should be the next step? That night there came to him as strongly as on the day when he was in the wine press a feeling that God was speaking to him. He pictured himself going down into the camp of the Midianites confident that God was helping him to plan, but it was a great risk. Should he go down there alone to spy out the land? There was Purah, his servant, and as he thought of Purah his courage rose. So, under cover of the darkness, he and his servant went down to the outposts of the Midianite camp. They, with their allies, were lying all along the

valley. Their camels seemed innumerable as the sands of the seashore. Just as Gideon came to the edge of the camp, however, he heard a man on the watch telling his comrade a dream. Gideon and Purah stopped and listened, "I just had a dream," the man said. "I dreamed that a crust of barley bread came tumbling into the camp of Midian and struck a tent so that it fell, and turned upside down so that the tent lay flat." "That," said his comrade in fear, "is nothing other than the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash of Israel. God is delivering Midian and all the camp into his power." Men believed in dreams in those days. They had heard of the gathering of the clans of Gideon, and they were afraid.

Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and he, too, felt that it was a sign from God. But to him it brought courage, and he bowed his head in reverence. He went quickly back to the camp, thinking fast as he went. When he arrived there, his plan was made. He said to his three hundred men, "Up, for the Lord is delivering the camp of Midian into your power." Quickly dividing the men into three companies, he bade them take their trumpets and their empty earthen water pitchers, and to place lighted torches inside the pitchers. Then he said, "Come, follow me. Watch me, and *do as I do*. When I blow the trumpet, you also blow your trumpets and shout, 'For Jehovah and for Gideon.'"

The little company started out. It was yet in the middle of the night. They marched quickly, scrambling at times down through the ravines and up over the wooded hillsides, saying no word, but keeping always in sight of Gideon. When they came finally to the outskirts of the camp of the Midianites, the watch had just been changed and the guards posted. Gideon motioned one group to the right, another to the left, he himself leading the third. As they spread about the camp, all watching him, they saw him suddenly swing his pitcher with a crash against that of the man nearest him, and above the terrible din a great shout arose which they instantly caught up, "For Jehovah and for Gideon." In a second every man was blowing his trumpet, smashing his pitcher against that of his neighbor, and shouting, "For Jehovah and for Gideon." The torches flared up from the broken pitchers. The noise was deafening; the shouts rose above the clatter of the pitchers. The sleeping camp woke suddenly, and the people imagined themselves in the hands of a great army. They started to run. In their mad flight and in the darkness they were unable to distinguish friend from enemy, but they knew the direction of the desert, and toward it they ran with Gideon and his men pursuing.

All the rest of the night the pursuit continued even across the river. Along the way were Hebrew villages containing many of those who had gone to their homes at Gideon's permission because they were afraid. But they were not afraid now; the situation had changed; Gideon was victorious. They came out to meet him on every hand and joined his army, and at length, as the morning sun rose, they found the last of their enemies either dead or out of sight, and they themselves commanding the countryside. They marched back in triumph to the village where there were great celebrations over their wonderful victory.

The next day the leading citizens came to Gideon. They were bringing gifts which they had taken as booty from the Midianites, gold and silver earrings, pendants, crescents, robes, and wonderful collars which had been taken from the necks of the camels. And they said to Gideon,

"Rule over us, you, then your son, then your grandson; for you have saved us from the power of Midian."

But there had been no king in Israel. Each man was accustomed to do what he thought was right, believing that he was responsible to God alone. Here was a great opportunity for Gideon. Should he become a king over his people and start a line of kings—his son and his grandson, and it might be many generations—to rule a people who might come to be the mightiest people on earth. How wonderful it would be! Again he must make a great decision. Would it be better for people to be responsible to him rather than to God? He thought hard. Then he answered the people, "I will *not* rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you, since the Lord rules over you. But let me make this request. Lest you forget this day of victory and that it was the Lord who gave you the victory, let every man bring all his gold and his silver and the spoils which he has won, and let them all be made into a memorial which shall be set up so that he who looks upon it may remember his God." And so they brought their gold and their silver, and Gideon made it into a statue and set it up in the village, and there it stood as a memorial of that great day in which with the help of God, and Gideon's own clear thinking, and the courage of his companions and himself, he had saved his people from their enemies and brought back their confidence in their God.

We have not been troubled in this story by the presence of angels, dreams, magic fire, and fleece, because they belonged to the rich imagination of these superstitious times, and they did not obscure the sturdy character of Gideon

with his valiant courage, quick brain, and unselfish devotion to his people, so vividly pictured in the Bible. He has *come alive*.

Continuing our examination of the Book of Judges, we come in the eleventh chapter to the story of another ancient hero, Jephthah. This story has unique value as a picture of the times. We shall observe the custom of purchasing the favor of God through a gift, and the assumption that he will particularly favor his own constituency.²

Jephthah, the Gileadite, had fled into exile because of the cruelty of his half-brothers. In his new home, a rough, courageous, sensitive man, he has already become a famous fighter, but he recognizes the obligation of blood even to those who wronged him. In their distress and perplexity at the impending attack of an aggressive neighboring people, his brothers call upon him for help, and he promptly responds. Apparently in his isolation his affections have centered about his daughter whose name we do not know, but whose story has made her famous.

The story itself needs much pruning, since the accounts are full of repetition which was acceptable to oriental ears. It has been necessary to select the actual facts which are thus repetitiously presented and to re-create such a story as follows:

Now Jephthah, the Gileadite, was a valiant warrior. Gilead, the father of Jephthah, had many sons but their mother was not the mother of Jephthah, and Jephthah was despised by them. They said, "You shall not inherit in our father's estate, for you are the son of another woman."

So Jephthah had fled from his brothers and was living in a land far to the north of Gilead, the land of Tob. Here, being a valiant young man, he had gathered about him others who, for one reason or another, were roaming about, and together they formed a band which went raiding around the country. Such bands were very common in those days. They

² We shall not need to locate it geographically or accurately.

gained their food in return for casual services, assisting shepherds or helping in the harvests but for the most part lived an adventurous life.

After a while, the Ammonites, who lived to the southeast, wished to make war against Israel to recover territory which had once been theirs. They claimed that it had been taken from them by the Hebrews. Jephthah's brothers in the land of Gilead adjacent to this territory were dismayed. They had no great warrior among them about whom they could rally, and they stood right in the path of the Ammonites. Then they remembered their outcast brother Jephthah. He had been a great fighter when he was at home. They had heard that he had grown still more formidable, for he now had a band of men as brave as himself. The leading men of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob. They said to him,

"Come, and be our commander that we may fight against the Ammonites."

But Jephthah replied to them, "Are you not the very men who hated me and drove me out of my father's house? Why, then, have you come to me now, when you are in trouble?"

"Ah," they said, "that is just why we have come back to you. Come with us and fight against the Ammonites, and be chief over us, over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

This was a great offer. Jephthah said to the men of Gilead, "If you take me back to fight against the Ammonites, and the Lord puts them at my mercy, shall I really become your chief?"

The elders of Gilead said, "The Lord shall be witness between us that we will do just as you say."

So Jephthah consented to go, and the people made him chief and commander over them. They prepared for war. In those days men thought that they must go to a holy place if they wished to talk with God. Jephthah went to the nearest holy place before he started on his journey back to Gilead and there he asked God's help. Then he continued on to Gilead. Arrived there, and in command, he sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites already camping on the borders of Gilead, saying, "What have you against me that you have come up against me to wage war on my country?"

The king of the Ammonites replied to the messengers, "Israel took away my lands when they came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and the Jordan; so now restore them peaceably."

Now Jephthah knew that this was not true. He knew that his people

had asked permission to pass peaceably through the lands east of the Jordan, and that only when this permission had not been granted, Israel had fought and won its way. So he returned word through messengers, "Israel did not take away the land of the Ammonites nor of any other people. But when they came up out of Egypt, Israel journeyed through the desert as far as the Red Sea, and then came to Kadesh. They then sent messengers to the kings of Edom, saying, 'Pray, let us pass through your land,' but the king of Edom would not agree. Likewise they sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. Then the people journeyed through the desert, making a circuit around these lands. Coming to the land of the Amorites, which was once yours, they sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, saying, 'Pray, let us pass through your land to our destination.' But Sihon refused to let Israel pass through his territory; collected his people, encamped at Jahaz, and *fought* with Israel. Then the God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the power of Israel so that they were defeated; and Israel occupied by *right* all the land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, and from the desert as far as the Jordan. So now they have a right to occupy that land. Should you not occupy the territory that your own god conquered, and allow us to occupy that which our God has conquered? We have committed no wrong against you, but you are committing a wrong in making war on me. Let God decide between us."

But the king of the Ammonites would not agree to this proposal. It was certain that a battle must be fought or the land of Gilead might be taken from Jephthah's people. Before gathering together his army, he visited the holy place of Mizpeh. There he made a solemn compact with God, saying, "If thou wilt but deliver the Ammonites into my power, whatsoever comes out of the door of my house to meet me, when I return in triumph from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's; I will offer it up as a burnt-offering."

And as he spoke, in imagination he saw one of his choicest animals coming through the door; or it might be one which had grown up as a household pet, for the animals were housed under the same roof as the family. The thought flashed through his mind, possibly it might be one of his own servants; could he fulfil that promise? Yes, even that. If Jehovah should make him the victor any of his possessions should be the Lord's. Well satisfied, Jephthah gathered together his forces, crossed over the country to the Ammonites to fight against them, and routed them with a great slaughter. Twenty of their little cities were taken.

There was great rejoicing in the ranks of Jephthah's army. They were returning in triumph to Gilead. Jephthah's thoughts flew to his household. He pictured the joy of his daughter when she should meet him. He would tell her of his great victory. He turned aside from his army, and went straight home. As he went on, he became more and more filled with the pride of his conquest. What would it mean to him, and to his beloved daughter, that he should now be an honored citizen, the ruler of his tribe, with a great future before him!

At last he drew near to his home thinking of these things, and as he lifted his eyes he saw coming from the door of his house to meet him, with tambourines and dance, his *daughter*. She was his one and only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. He thought of his vow. He tore his garments and cried out, "Alas, my daughter, you have stricken me low! You have indeed brought calamity on me! For I made a vow and I cannot set it aside."

Seeing the tragedy in his face and knowing that this vow must concern her, she said, "You have made a vow to the Lord. Do to me as you declared, now that the Lord has made you victor over your enemies, the Ammonites. But first, let me go away for two months and roam on the mountains and bewail my fate." Well she knew the possibility of that vow. It might be death; at the least a great disaster. She must have time to prepare for it.

And Jephthah said, "Go."

So for two months she and her companions lived in the mountains where in sorrow they communed together. At the end of two months she came back to her father, and he did to her what he had vowed. For many years after a group of Israelite maidens might be found on that mountain for four days in each year bewailing the fate of the daughter of Jephthah, their beloved companion. And Jephthah, alone in his sorrow and in the darkness of his own ignorance, thought that what he had done was right before God. In his heart did he sometimes question whether he had a right to give, or Jehovah a right to take, so great a sacrifice? But it was a vow, and he was sure that not to have carried out the vow would have brought upon him the vengeance of God.

What is the religious value of this picture? Certainly, Jephthah was not a model to copy. But who can read the story in connection with those that have preceded it and fail to see in it new light upon the religious and social ideals

of those rough times? In it we sense the crudity of the Hebrew idea of God at this time and the slight difference between it and the thought of their gods held by the Canaanites. It was just a question of whose god was the strongest. We shall not, however, overlook the sacredness with which a vow was regarded, the strength of the ties of kinship, the ability of men to require stern obligations of themselves, qualities which in any stage of culture are deeply significant.

In this story we probably have also an example of a story kept alive in a custom—that of the Israelite maidens who went to a certain place annually to mourn the early death of Jephthah's daughter, perhaps coming to typify the death of any young unmarried woman who left no children to mourn her death.

A story that is better known than most biblical stories is that of Samson (Judges, chaps. 13–16). The space given to it in the Bible and the detail in which it is told are indications of the pleasure which the Hebrews took in relating it. It is a story from the southwest country on the border of Palestine which remained in the hands of the Philistines long unconquered by the Hebrews. Of course, in those days, from the point of view of the Hebrews, all the peoples already in the land which they were claiming were possible foes, and anything which could be done to annoy them was supposed to be pleasing to God. Although the Philistines, who had migrated from the west, had a much longer history of civilization behind them than the Hebrews, who were accustomed, as the story tells us, to go to the Philistines for services such as the grinding of their tools, the purchasing of goods, and even for entertainment, they were barbarians in the estimation of the Hebrews.

In telling the story, we must always remember that these

things which the story attributes to God represent what the Hebrew of that time thought that God would say or do, just as today we say, from quite a different point of view, and in the light of our own civilization, what attitude *we* think God might take about some condition of today. To the ancient Hebrews the spirit of God did actuate Samson.

Again to make a complete illustration we insert the whole story, revised for use:

The Hebrews were at peace with their neighbors. After many years of struggle they had succeeded in making themselves strong in the land which they believed to be their inheritance. Many of their enemies had been vanquished, some of them only quieted. The Philistines, a strong and vigorous people living on the coastland, had long possessed important cities, and the Israelites had made no serious attempts to dislodge them from this most desirable section of the land. In fact, they recognized the superiority of the Philistines, both in numbers and in the arts of war, and desired to be friends with them, for it was very convenient to go to Philistine cities for new tools, for clothing such as they could not weave themselves, and for those luxuries which developed in city life. The Hebrews were learning much from their Philistine neighbors. But they well knew that they must treat them with respect, for to provoke them to anger would mean to bring disaster upon their own heads. While they were careful not to offend the Philistines, true to their old tradition that the Hebrews were the specially favored children of God, they naturally regarded these neighbors as his enemies and rejoiced in any disasters or annoyances that might come to them.

In the north of Canaan there lived a man Manoah, whose wife was childless, and the good couple longed for a child. The woman had even said that should a son be born to her she would dedicate him to God as a holy man. In an old story about her it was said that she prayed to the Lord that he would send her a son, and that an angel appeared and told her that a son would be born. At all events, this woman became the mother of a son, and she called his name Samson. So grateful were Manoah and his wife for this gift of a son that they wished to fulfil the promise that his mother had made, and to devote him to the Lord. Their way of doing this was to say, "He shall become a Nazirite." Now a Nazirite was a holy man supposed to be set apart for God, and the signs

of his holiness, which were called vows, were three: he should never cut his hair, come near or touch anything that was dead, or drink wine.

As Samson grew up in the village, he developed remarkable physical strength. There was no boy that he could not throw, no burden that he could not lift. But along with his strength he also developed an arrogant, selfish, and bullying spirit. He knew that he was bound by the threefold promise to God made by his parents. Like all the people of his times, he believed that any unusual physical characteristic such as that of great strength was a special gift of God. Yet these things only made him more arrogant. He so scorned the advice of his parents that they came to fear him in many ways.

When he grew to young manhood, he began to think of taking a wife. On one of his frequent visits to the Philistine city of Timnah he saw a Philistine woman whom he thought he would like to marry. So, according to custom, when he came back to his home, he said to his father and mother, "I saw a woman at Timnah, one of the Philistine women; now, then, get her for me for a wife."

But his mother and father said to him in astonishment and dismay, "Is there no woman among the girls of your own kinsmen or among all our people, that you should go and get a wife from the Philistines?"

But Samson said to his father and mother, "Get her for me; she is the one that suits *me*."

His father and mother did not know what to do for they feared a quarrel with the Philistines, yet they were afraid to disregard the wishes of Samson. In due time, therefore, Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah. They were walking along the road, the father and mother well in advance, and Samson loitering on behind. They had just reached the vineyards of Timnah when a young lion came roaring out at him. He turned in a passion upon the lion and tore him apart as he might have torn a kid. He threw the body of the lion into the bushes, but he did not tell his father and mother what he had done.

They came to the home of the woman, who charmed Samson even more than before, and the necessary bargain was made with her father. Samson and his father and mother returned to their home. After a sufficient time had elapsed for the woman to prepare for her marriage, they returned for the wedding. Again, as they were walking along the highway, Samson loitering behind as before, they came to the vineyards of Timnah. He turned aside, curious to see what had become of the dead lion which he had thrown into the bushes. Quite regardless of the Nazirite

vow by which he was bound and which forbade him to go near anything that was dead, he approached the lion and found that a swarm of bees was inhabiting the carcass and had made honey there. Stooping over, he scraped it out into his hands and ate it as he went along. A moment later, he caught up with his father and mother, and he gave them some of it to eat, but he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey out of the carcass of the lion.

As was the custom in those days, the wedding festival lasted a week. Thirty friends of the bride were selected to be the special wedding party during the week. One day the company was amusing itself by propounding riddles and guessing them. Samson said, remembering the lion about which no one knew but himself, "Let me give you a riddle. If you can solve it for me before the seven days of this feast are over, I will give you thirty linen robes and thirty festal gowns, one for each of you. But if you are unable to tell me the answer, then you must give me thirty linen robes and thirty festal gowns." In his mind Samson was already beginning to enjoy those robes which he expected to be his. "Give us your riddle," they said to him. "Let us hear it." So he said,

"Out of the eater came something to eat;
Out of the strong came something sweet."

For three days they thought and discussed and worked upon that riddle. The fourth day they went to Samson's wife. They said, "Coax your husband to tell us the riddle. If you do not, we will burn you up and your father's house. Was it to impoverish us that you invited us here?"

So Samson's wife wept on his shoulder, and said, "You simply hate me, and do not love me at all. You have proposed a riddle to my countrymen without telling me the answer."

He said to her, "Why, I haven't told my father or my mother; why should I tell you?"

But she wept on his shoulder all the rest of the feast until finally, on the seventh day, hard-pressed by her, he gave her the answer. Then she told it to her countrymen, and on the last hour of the last day the men of the city came grinning to him and said, "What is sweeter than honey, and what is stronger than a lion?"

He said, "If you had not plowed with this heifer of mine," meaning his wife, "you would not have found out this riddle of mine." Samson was furiously angry at his wife and at his friends. He left them all and went

back to his father's house. But the bride, not to be disappointed of a husband, was given by her father to one of the thirty friends. He had been Samson's rival for her affection.

Many days passed. It was the time of the wheat harvest, when Samson, now recovered from his fit of anger, decided that he would go down to Philistia and claim his wife. Accordingly he went to her father's house, but the father would not let him in. He said, "I thought, of course, that you must simply hate her, so I gave her to your rival. Here is her younger sister, is she not better? Take her instead."

Then Samson's anger rose again. He said, "This time I will get even with these Philistines." So he went and caught three hundred foxes. He took torches, and turning tail to tail he put a torch between each pair of tails, and setting fire to the torches he turned the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both that which was standing in shocks and that which had not been reaped, and also the vineyards and the olive groves.

There was great tumult among the Philistines. "Who has done this?" they asked. And someone answered, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because his wife was taken away and given to his rival." Then the Philistines in great fury went up and burned down her father's house, and she was burned with it. So Samson's revenge lost him his wife.

Samson said, "You can never do such a thing as this without my taking revenge on you," and he slew all that were within his reach and then fled to a cave in a craggy mountain in his own land.

But the Philistines determined that they would take him prisoner, and a great company of them went up and camped on the borders of Judah. Some of the principal men of Judah came out to meet them and said, "Why have you come up against us?"

They answered, "We have come up to take Samson prisoner that we may do to him as he did to us."

Then a great company of the Judeans went to the place where they knew that Samson was hidden and they said, "Do you not know that the Philistines hold sway over us? What ever have you done to us?"

"As they did to me," he replied, "so have I done to them."

"We have come down to take you prisoner," they said to him, "to turn you over to the Philistines."

"Swear to me that you will not fall upon me yourselves," Samson said to them.

"No," they responded, "we will take you prisoner, and turn you over to them, but we will not kill you."

So he permitted them to bind him with two new ropes and they brought him up to the Philistines, who were shouting and coming to meet them. But just as he came within reach he broke the robes like flax that had caught fire, and made his escape. The old stories used to say that "he seized the jawbone of an ass and killed a thousand men" as he fled. An old song about it goes

"With the red ass's jawbone I have dyed them red;
With the red ass's jawbone I have felled a thousand men."

The Philistines gave up in despair.

Years passed, and again Samson was going to the cities of Philistia for his pleasure, and again the Philistines were watching for an opportunity to seize him and imprison him. On one of his visits he fell in love with a Philistine woman whose name was Delilah. Immediately her countrymen came to her and said, "Coax him and find out why his strength is so great and how we can overpower him and bind him helpless, and we will each give you eleven hundred shekels of silver."

This was a great sum to Delilah, and so when the opportunity came she said to Samson, "Do tell me why your strength is so great, and how you can be bound helpless?"

Samson said to her, "If I were to be bound with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I should become weak, and be like any other man."

She told her friends, and one day the Philistine leaders brought her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and Samson allowed her to bind him with them. Then, having arranged with the men to lie in wait in the inner room, she said to him,

"The Philistines are upon you, Samson!"

But he snapped the bowstrings, as a strand of tow is snapped when it comes near fire. So the source of his strength was not discovered.

Then Delilah said to Samson, "There, you have trifled with me, and told me lies! Do tell me now how you can be bound."

So he said to her, "If I were but bound with new ropes that have not been used, I should become weak, and be like any other man."

So again at her first opportunity Delilah undertook to bind Sampson. She took new ropes and bound him fast.

The Philistines were waiting. When all was ready, she called, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson." But he snapped off those ropes from his arms like thread, and they dared not touch him.

Still Delilah persisted. One day she said to Samson, "Up to now you have trifled with me and told me lies. Tell me how you *can* be bound."

So he said to her, "If you were to weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom and beat them in with the pin, I should become weak like any other man."

One day, while Samson was asleep, Delilah wove the hair of his head into the web of the loom and beat it in with a pin. The Philistines were again lying in wait. She called to him.

"The Philistines are upon you, Samson."

But he awoke from his sleep and pulled up both the loom and the web.

Delilah was filled with disappointment, and the Philistines were sorely tried with her, but she determined to make one more attempt. One day in a coaxing manner she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you do not confide in me? Three times already you have trifled with me and have not told me why your strength is so great."

And now she kept on day after day urging him continually until he grew tired to death of it, and told her his whole secret. He said, "A razor has never been used on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my birth. If I were to be shaved, my strength would leave me. I should become weak and be like any other man."

This time Delilah felt sure that he had told the truth. She soon sent for the Philistine leaders, saying, "Come up this once, for he has told me his whole secret."

So one day they came, and they brought the money that they had promised her in their hands. Then she anxiously put Samson to sleep on her knees and, calling a man, she bade him shave off the abundant hair on Samson's head.

Then, calling, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson," he woke from his sleep and discovered in dismay that his hair was gone. But he thought, "I shall get off as I have done before, and shake myself free."

And then there flashed across his mind his broken vows. Would God take away his strength? Before he had time to think again, the waiting Philistines had seized him, put out his eyes, and were taking him down to their city of Gaza. They bound him with shackles of bronze and set him to grinding in the prison. The days and weeks passed wearily, for he had nothing to think about but his own worthless victories, and what he felt to be the great injuries which people had done to him, most of all, the blinding of his eyes. Day by day the old desire for revenge grew upon him. All that he could see in the past were his injuries through the

Philistines, and his repeated revenge upon them. Meanwhile his hair was growing. Would his old strength come back to him? He had no way of testing it, shackled as he was.

One day the Philistines were gathered in Gaza for a great religious feast to their god Dagon. It was accompanied by merry-making and shouts of triumph because, as they said, "Our god has delivered our enemy Samson into our power." And they made a show of Samson. The people went to look at him, and they praised their god, saying, "Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands, the devastator of our lands and him who slew us in bands."

When they were in very high spirits, they said, "Bring Samson out that he may make sport for us."

So he was brought out from the prison, and they laughed at him. Samson's long-cherished spirit of revenge possessed him. He knew that temple well. Blind as he was, he could see in his mind every feature of it. He said to the attendant who was holding his hand, "Put me so I can feel the pillars on which this building is supported, that I may lean against them." And they placed him between the pillars which supported the temple of the god. Now the building was full of men and women and all the Philistine leaders were there, and the roof also was crowded with people looking down upon Samson. Then he determined what he would do. One last prayer for revenge—

"O Lord God, remember me and give me strength just this one time, O God, to wreak vengeance upon the Philistines."

He grasped the two pillars on which the building was supported, one with his right hand and the other with his left, and he bowed himself forward, crying, "Let me die with the Philistines." He pulled with all his might so that the building fell in and all the people within it were killed. But in his last act of revenge Samson himself perished.

The glory of a man's strength is not in the amount of it but in what he does with it. The Strong Man of the Hebrews was selfish to the core. From his boyhood every annoyance to himself was viciously revenged until he could think only in terms of revenge, and thus he died.

Again we must raise the question: Of what value is this story, religiously speaking? Perhaps it is worth while to tell the story simply to correct the prevailing idea among people of today that Samson was a hero; for he was no hero, but a very selfish strong man, delighting in annoying his

family and friends, as well as the enemies of his people. His satisfaction was in revenge. But perhaps we have an opportunity to help boys and girls to see that physical strength in itself may be either a disaster or a blessing. Youth of today glories in its physical strength, and justifiably, but we can direct attention to the fact that, as surely as in the case of Samson, strength directed to selfish ends brings disaster not only upon the strong men but others. The glory of strength lies in the will to use it for constructive ends and for the good of all. The spectacle of brutality in our modern civilization is but the spectacle of Samson with powers multiplied a million-fold by the mechanical facilities of our present world. There is food for thought even in this fantastic story.

Perhaps not for use in religious teaching, but to sharpen our own sense of the crude religious ideas of these times, we will read carefully the story of Micah and the Danites (chaps. 17 and 18), a story of a stolen god and a stolen priest. The migratory aspects of the story helps us also to see the unsettled condition of the land.

The little fable of the trees in 9:1-15 may serve to emphasize the obligation to accept public responsibility. It is as clever and applicable today as it was long ago. Every community has its "bramble bushes" in office because its "olive trees" shirk their duty. Let us beware!

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

True appreciation of the Bible requires some knowledge of its background of history. There was no such thing as copyright in early times. A person who so desired could rewrite, add to or subtract from a production which fell into his hands, or he could interlard it with comments. Most books of the Bible, therefore, represent the thought of different generations.

The unity of the Bible consists in the singleness of purpose of authors and editors, namely, to benefit their people and to serve their God. "They spake as they were moved of God," not automatically but by the inspiration of keen minds impelled by strong hearts and undying faith in and sympathy with God.

Ethical and religious standards were of the times. God cannot be held responsible for all acts and feelings attributed to him by biblical writers. They were groping in their struggle to satisfy their ideal of him which changed from century to century.

We must see for ourselves and lead our pupils to feel this background of personality and to recognize great qualities such as patriotism, kindness, courage, unselfish devotion, and enthusiasm even when dressed in ancient garments of miracle, and strange customs and ideas; they must learn to distinguish between the spirit and the dress. It is also true that qualities and events extolled in the Old Testament may not always meet our own ideals. *We* measure by the standard of Jesus. *They* could not.

Flat narrative of events is of little or no religious value. Material must be handled with such appreciation as to stimulate a desirable emotional drive in the youth of today. In cutting through the attitudes of centuries to the heart of these stories in the Book of Judges we find genuine pleasure and profit. Its heroes have become living characters in a past *to which they belong*. True these stories of heroes are best suited to nine- to twelve-year-old groups; but their religious values remain an inspiration beyond those years if the stories are presented in a living way, and many a man or woman holding back from a great task may well recall the dauntless spirit of Deborah and the astuteness of Gideon.

CHAPTER III

SAMUEL THE PROPHET, SAUL THE KING JONATHAN THE WARRIOR AND FRIEND

THE FIRST AND SECOND BOOKS OF SAMUEL

THE First Book of Samuel and the Second Book of Samuel are a part of the complete story of the Hebrew kingdom, how it was founded, its progress from century to century, and its fall. We have already seen that the material at the disposal of any writer varied in quantity and quality. The books of Samuel and Kings, which seem to form a complete record, make only brief mention of events that one would expect to be counted of importance. And again stories are incorporated which seem to be unimportant historically, and the prose text is sometimes broken by the insertion of poems. Frequently, two differing accounts of the same event appear, especially in the books of Samuel. It is convincing to read an example, as the incident of Saul and the prophets.¹

So Saul rose and he and Samuel went out into the street. As they were going down near the city limits, Samuel said to Saul,

"Tell the servant to pass on before us (and he passed on), but do you halt at this point that I may make known to you the word of God."

Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it on his head, and kissed him and said,

"Has not the LORD anointed you to be a leader over his people Israel? You shall rule over the people of the LORD and deliver them from the power of their enemies round about; and this shall be the sign that the

¹ Others are David coming to the court of Saul (I Sam. 16:14-23; 17:12-58); the rejection of Saul by Samuel (I Sam. 13:1-14; chap. 15); and two stories woven together in chap. 20, of the flight of David from Saul (I Sam. 20:4-10, 12-17, 24-34, and 20:1-3, 11, 18-23, 35-42).

LORD has anointed you to be a leader over his heritage: when you go from me today you will find two men at Rachel's tomb, in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say to you, 'The asses which you went to seek are found, and now your father has dismissed the matter of the asses only to become anxious about you, saying, "What shall I do regarding my son?"' Then you shall hasten on from there until you come to the oak of Tabor; and there three men going up to God to Bethel will meet you, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine. They will greet you and give you two loaves of bread which you shall take from their hands. Afterward you will come to the hill of God, where there is a Philistine post; and furthermore when you come there to the city, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place with a lyre, a tambourine, a flute, and a harp before them; and they will be prophesying ecstatically. Then the spirit of the LORD shall suddenly seize upon you, and you shall prophesy ecstatically with them and you shall be changed into another man. When these signs come to you, do as the occasion demands; for God is with you. You shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I shall be coming down to you, to offer burnt-offerings and to sacrifice thank-offerings. Wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you shall do."

Accordingly when he turned about to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart, and all these signs took place that day. When they came there to the hill, behold, a band of prophets met him; and the spirit of God suddenly seized upon him, and he prophesied ecstatically among them. When all his former acquaintances saw that he really prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another,

"What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

A bystander answered and said,

"But who is their father?"

Therefore it became a proverb,

"Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Now when he had finished prophesying, he went home [I Sam. 9:27—10:11].

Again and differently we read of the origin of this saying:

Accordingly when it was told Saul, saying,

"David is there at Naioth in Ramah,"

Saul sent messengers to take David. But when they saw an assemblage of prophets prophesying with Samuel standing as head over them, the spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, so that they also prophesied. When they told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied ecstatically. Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied ecstatically. Then Saul's anger was aroused and he himself went to Ramah. When he came to the cistern of the threshing floor, which is on the bare height, he asked and said,

"Where are Samuel and David?"

"You will find him at Naioth in Ramah," they said.

But when he went from there to Naioth in Ramah, the spirit of God came upon him also, and as he went along he prophesied ecstatically, until he came to Naioth in Ramah. He even stripped off his clothes, and he also prophesied ecstatically before Samuel, and fell down and lay naked all that day and all night. *Therefore they say,*

"Is Saul also among the prophets?" [I Sam. 9:20-24].

Our compiler probably had far more material about David, or at least considers his reign so far superior in importance that he really makes his stories of Samuel and Saul constitute an introduction to the story of David. We cannot help feeling that in the earlier chapters of Samuel he is simply leading up to his great hero, for after the fifteenth chapter, in which Saul is demoted, so to speak, by Samuel, the story becomes not a story of his kingdom but of Saul's enmity to and pursuit of David, during which David is represented as divinely protected. We are justified in giving only such attention to the early chapters as helps us to form a picture of the historical and religious background.²

We gather from the first six chapters elements of a picture of the central portion of Palestine in perhaps the eleventh century B.C. The people in a small section worshiped

² It is probable that the songs in this book were added by some later editor, and also that there may be insertions of other later materials, since the theology of the book seems to be not wholly consistent.

in a tabernacle where a sacred ark was kept. It was guarded by priests. People came to the tabernacle to offer sacrifices and to pray. If we remember that they walked or rode on asses, we shall realize that tribes at a distance could not easily worship at this place, and indeed might even be ignorant of the existence of Ark and Tabernacle.³ More than one generation had passed since the first Hebrews came into the land. There were no easy communications from the past or in the present. One may recall the story of the stolen priest and idol, suggesting that the Danites took care to make a place of worship near home.

The priests who cared for the Ark at Shiloh, offering the sacrifices of the people who came to worship, seem to have been somewhat irregular in character, even when judged by the rough standards of the times. Eli, a member of the tribe of Levi, was in charge, but his sons had apparently

³ Traditions of the Ark cannot be accurately dated. Idealizations of it reflect the imagery of centuries later. Even its contents are uncertain, although later tradition claimed that it held tables of stone upon which Moses had inscribed the Ten Commandments, a serpent of brass commemorating the deliverance from serpents in the wilderness, a pot of manna memorializing the saving bread of their journeyings, and possibly other sacred things. But, whatever its contents, the Ark certainly symbolized the presence of God. When the Hebrews lost it, in a battle with the Philistines, the people believed that God was no longer present in the Tabernacle.

"The glory is departed from Israel,
For the Ark of God is taken."

The Philistines also regarded the Ark with superstition, for after capturing it they were extremely glad to get rid of it, placing it on the borders of Hebrew territory where it could be rescued by its owners without danger, after which it was installed in the home of a Hebrew.

An interesting group of stories, "The Adventures of the Ark," can be prepared with little difficulty, coming to a climax in the story of King David bringing the Ark from its refuge, taking it to Jerusalem with great ceremony, and there installing it as the center of his own worship of God.

made the priesthood a family affair and were using it for their own ends.⁴

Although our historian is inclined to minimize accounts of Samuel and Saul, as compared with David, this first notable prophet, who grew up at Shiloh, and afterward exercised authority as a prophet, priest, and judge, commands our regard as a significant personality.⁵ Unfortunately, we know very little about him. It is interesting to observe, however, that, with three great names to choose from in naming his book, our chronicler chose that of Samuel. Undoubtedly, Samuel brought a certain unity into the region where he lived.

The books of Samuel open with an infancy story, the feature with which so many Hebrew biographers decorated their annals. It is very charming in its simplicity opening with a picture of the Hebrew woman Hannah, coming with her husband, on a pilgrimage to the sanctuary, calling upon God in sorrowful and even violent supplication for the blessed gift of a child, sealing her prayer by a vow, and leaving the sacred place reassured by old Eli. The son later born was deemed a sacred gift and, when old enough to leave his mother, was taken to the sanctuary, where he remained to assist old Eli. God-given, he was now consecrated to the service of God. The curse of childlessness had been removed from the mother, and that satisfied her. The song of praise with which she returns thanks is a collection of stanzas from different ancient songs.

⁴ From very early times members of the tribe of Levi were favored as priests "so much so that when the original tribe disappeared, the name was applied to professional priests, who developed into an hereditary and ecclesiastical body."

⁵ In chap. 7, however, we find the story of the consecration of a priest, Eleazer, who was not a prophet—an indication that the two functions might soon be quite separate.

To the historian Samuel's importance lies in the fact that with an authority believed to be direct from God he chose or at least sanctioned the choice of Israel's first king. The details of his story in the chapters which follow are unimportant except as they represent the growing power of the Hebrews. The domination of the Philistines was not soon diminished but continued for many years, and Samuel in a varied relationship of prophet, priest, and judge represented the political, civil, and religious will of God.

Just what pressure was brought upon him to co-operate in the selection and anointing of a king it is impossible wholly to discover. Probably the need of a strong military leader to lead the people against the Philistines, and the presence of a towering figure like that of Saul, who had already manifested his zeal for his people, were elements in the situation. Since our editor definitely attributes all historical movements to the suggestion or command of God, he does not think it worth while to give us any other interpretation. But, as war between the Philistines and the Hebrews seems to have been pretty constant, it was but natural that the people should desire a fighting man to lead them in a more systematic campaign. Samuel could not be that, and in his sons the people had already lost confidence. Evidently, however, it became a tradition among the prophets that the first king had been chosen for and dedicated to his task by a prophet.⁶

Did Samuel think a king really necessary or expedient for the people, or did he simply yield as gracefully as might be to the inevitable? How much of wisdom and how much

⁶ It is useless for us to speculate on behalf of pupils as to Samuel's real attitudes toward Saul. Mutual discussion of the subject, if one is required to teach this portion of the book, is interesting.

of personal feeling was there in his later failure to support Saul? Who knows? Even the prophets were human.

The story of Saul begins in chapter 9. We are at once informed that he was a very handsome man and a stalwart figure, and we surmise that he was already a marked man in his tribe, a gallant warrior and in all probability already well known to Samuel. Just what was said in the conference that took place between Samuel and Saul on that momentous occasion when Saul, in search of his father's asses, came to consult Samuel as a seer we do not know. It is apparent that to consult a representative of God on such matters as the loss of property was not unusual and that Samuel "aforetime called a seer" was supposed to have magical powers. This visit was characterized by a special meal of a ceremonial character. The visit terminated, according to the story, in the anointing of Saul as the ruler of the people and one who should deliver them from the power of their enemies. The story of the return of Saul (chap. 10) is picturesque. We have already read how a band of prophets coming from a place of rendezvous (for they probably lived in informal groups possibly under the leadership of Samuel) swept Saul up and along. He in his elation over his recent anointing is seized with their ecstasy, an event so unusual that it became a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" This ecstatic state was cultivated in early times as a desirable accompaniment or sign of prophetic activity. It seems to have been a letting-go of controls and the abandonment of one's self to the vagaries of uncontrolled emotion, perhaps resulting in a state of trance.⁷

There are two other stories about the choice of Saul as

⁷ For a comparison of early Hebrew prophets with prophets of other Semitic peoples see J. M. P. Smith, *The Prophet and His Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), chaps. i and ii.

king. Frequently, the editor of a book does not deem it necessary to choose one story instead of another. He uses all of them and leaves us to discover for ourselves what he and the people of his times well knew—that they were not stories of consecutive circumstances but different accounts of the same event and not necessarily consistent. In religious teaching they are all interesting to us, as in each we find some clue to the personality of the character about whom we are studying.

A story of the siege of Israelitish Jabesh-Gilead by Nahash the Ammonite tells us that the withdrawal of the Ammonites by peaceful agreement was conditioned on the consent of the men of Jabesh to have their right eyes put out. Their appeal for help gave to Saul an occasion for a call to arms. He came to the rescue with a hastily gathered army and defeated Nahash and, as a consequence of his victory, was proclaimed king at Gilgal (I Samuel, chap. 11). Again, we read of a popular assembly at Mizpeh, where Saul was elected by the sacred lot (I Sam. 10:17–26).

However it came about, we soon find Saul a king, with a fairly well-organized army of several thousand men, Jonathan his son being one of its leaders. The war with the Philistines was on.⁸ At one time Jonathan, acting upon his own initiative without his father's command, struck at the center of the Philistine outpost and scattered them in confusion. His father, following, routed the Philistines and drove them back through the pass by which they had entered the country (I Sam. 13:19–14:24). Doubtless Saul

⁸ The Philistines migrated into Palestine from the north and west, possibly from Crete or Asia Minor. They were not a Semitic people, as were the Hebrews, but were Aryans. This name given by them to the land which they conquered remains as Palestine. They established five important cities which long remained a menace to the Hebrews but seem to have acted independently without common central government.

fought many other foes. His defeat of the Amalekites (I Samuel, chap. 15)⁹ is very likely one of many successful encounters.

But we soon come upon the notice of a break between Samuel and Saul, probably the result of continued disagreement as to policies and the failure of Saul to recognize the authority of Samuel as the sole representative of God. He seems to have come to feel himself quite capable of establishing his own relations with the Lord. At all events the favor of Samuel was transferred to David, and at a moment when patient constructive work was necessary in order to unify the people the king became morbid and irrational.

From this point on the story of Saul shows us a maladjusted personality.¹⁰ He became suspicious and jealous of his chief warrior, David, of whose coming to court we have seen that there were two accounts (I Sam. 16:14-23; 17:12-58).

David had risen in the confidence of the people partly because of his victories but also because of his attractive personality. Even though he was an intimate friend and companion of the king's son, and married the king's daughter, Saul regarded him as a dangerous rival. Ridden by fear, he was torn between his desire to kill this successful and popular younger man and sudden fits of repentance. Even after he had forced David to take refuge among the Philistines and become an exile, Saul still pursued him. Samuel died. War with the Philistines continued with Saul

⁹ A people belonging to the region between Palestine and Egypt.

¹⁰ Browning's *Saul* may be read with interest here. It is a poet's interpretation, but its picture of Saul in his black moods is vivid and realistic and possibly comes nearer to giving us an appreciation of his malady than the very brief items in the Bible.

at the head of his own armies, but things were going badly. Losing confidence in himself, he lost it in his friends, even in his son. Saul's discouragement became so great that in desperation he decided to visit the witch of Endor in order that he might consult the dead adviser of his youth, Samuel. Earlier in his reign he had exiled all witches and mediums from the land, and this one was in hiding.¹¹ Just what the method of the witch of Endor was we do not know, but Saul certainly believed that he had been visited by the spirit of Samuel and had received a message of defeat and death. The effect was devastating to his courage. In his next battle he fell on the field and his sons with him. Of this there are two accounts (I Samuel, chap. 31; II Sam. 1:6-10). The latter of these is probably colored by the messenger to his own advantage.

Although the reign of Saul lasted from young manhood to his death in company with his grown sons, most of what our author chooses to tell us about him is learned from the story of David, in which the author designedly sets the character of Saul, of whom he disapproved, into unfavorable juxtaposition with that of his favorite hero David, greatly but perhaps unjustly to the disadvantage of Saul.

As a type there is much food for thought in the story of Israel's first king. The emotional response to it must be away from the character rather than toward it. Such a negative example may be of value to the youth of today, who are facing so acutely the need for revaluing the qualities required for political leadership. It may give them

¹¹ Other references in this early literature lead us to conclude that belief in persons who could communicate with the dead, sorcerers, witches, and the like, was still widely prevalent. The prophets in later years frequently condemned it. This story may easily be ancient and authentic. For a more detailed study of Saul see *What Religion Does for Personality* (American Institute of Sacred Literature, The University of Chicago).

pause before too quick choice of any man who seems attractive and competent but of whose real character they have little knowledge. A good beginning does not always forecast a good ending. The character and personality traits of a man must be known before one can predict what the exigencies of public life may do to him.

Although one may not wish to use the full story of Saul, one of Jonathan, his son, which is imbedded in the story of Saul and David, may be abstracted and used effectively. We shall not expect to find an account, without discrepancies, but these are not so great as to spoil the story. We recall (I Sam. 13:15) that Saul, deserted by Samuel in the conduct of war with the Philistines, continues to fight. Jonathan is with him. Many of the Hebrews have gone down to Philistia to visit the blacksmiths for the sharpening of their agricultural and war instruments. As a consequence at a time when a battle with the Philistines is imminent, weapons are few, and the Philistines take advantage of the opportunity to force a battle. Saul has rashly compelled his people to join him in a sacred oath that no food shall be eaten until the day of battle is over and he has triumphed. Jonathan, ignorant of his father's oath and noting that a contingent of Philistines is trying to make the pass at Michmash, takes his armor-bearer and goes to the pass to investigate, but without orders from his father, who is in command of the army. Saul, apparently seeking divine guidance, in other words trying to determine whether God would approve of a battle, is with a body of his men under a pomegranate tree¹² by a certain threshing-floor, with him a priest having an ephod for divination.

¹² It is interesting to note in how many cases in this early period oracles were given under trees. It was doubtless a current belief that God manifested himself through the rustling of the leaves of trees. Deborah's place for deliver-

Jonathan has not been missed. He is venturing to explore beyond the pass. The Philistines, seeing him, rush forward to kill, and Jonathan and his armor-bearer alone in the narrow pass slay the Philistines as they come, and spread terror in the enemy camp. Saul, in a position to observe, notices the melting-away of the enemy, and immediately commands a search to see who is leading an attack without authority. He attempts to consult a priest, but a real battle is already on. Setting aside the priest, Saul plunges into the fight. Jonathan and his men, having already refreshed themselves with wild honey, were told that Saul had pronounced a curse upon anyone who ate before a victory was achieved. Jonathan in his exultation speaks lightly of the vow. At last after a great slaughter of Philistines, the starving victors throw themselves upon the animals of the Philistines, eating ravenously, gorging themselves regardless of the fact that they are ignoring religious custom in eating the animals not first offered to God, who had given them the victory. Saul, not knowing who had precipitated this battle, senses that his vow has been broken. Who is the guilty

ing her oracles, advising, and answering inquiries was under a palm tree. Gideon was visited by the angel under the terebinth at Ophra, which belonged to Joash, a particular tree (evergreen) which was apparently well known as a sacred place. Saul, the story tells us, was rallying his people "under the pomegranate tree which is by the threshing-floor" in the outskirts of Gibeah, a special tree known to be in a special place, and very likely one where it was thought that God manifested himself. Saul assembling his forces to address his people "under a tamarisk tree on the high place," an evergreen tree on a hill (I Sam. 22:6). The rustling of the leaves of the balsam trees is described as God marching in the tops of the trees. George Adam Smith comments: "No one can tell how many voices a tree has who has not come up to it from the silence of the great desert. No one may imagine how 'possessed' a landscape can feel—as if singled out and endowed by some divinity for his own domain and residence—who has not, across the forsaken plateaus of Moab or Ante-Lebanon, fallen upon one of the sudden Syrian rivers with its wealth of water and verdure."

person? The army brought to order, he sets about finding the disobedient one by casting lots. He swears that even if a lot should fall upon his own son he will fulfil his vow and the victim shall be killed. The episode ends with the ransom of Jonathan by the people (I Sam. 14:38-45).

Jonathan next appears (18:1-4) expressing his admiration for the youthful David by equipping him with his own military trappings, and they become staunch friends. The time comes, however, when Saul seeks to enlist Jonathan in his cruel pursuit of David, and Jonathan in his deep affection tries to save his friend by warning him (19:1-7). The story is so entwined here with the pursuit of David by Saul that one must omit large portions of it in order that Jonathan may be the hero of the story rather than David. David comes to Jonathan in his distress (20:1-42). The story here is graphic but must be shortened. Conversations should be retained, for they make the story live. When David and Jonathan part in sadness, Jonathan returns to the city, continuing to go into battle with his father again and again, until on one disastrous day the Philistines are victorious, and Saul and his sons are killed on the battlefield, and their bodies desecrated. Loyal Hebrews, those men of Jabesh-Gilead who, themselves once rescued by the young Saul, took these bodies and buried them under a sacred tree in their own land.

The story of Jonathan as one among other stories of great friendships has genuine religious value; but one who tells it must keep the vivid coloring of primitive ideas and customs.

A later poet sings of this battle in a dirge attributed to David. It may even be possible that David himself was the writer of this poem, which has long since become a classic.

Then David sang this dirge over Saul and Jonathan his son (behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar to instruct the Judeans), and he said,

“Thy beauty, O Israel,
Upon thy heights is slain.
How have the heroes fallen!

“Tell it not in Gath,
Announce it not in the streets of Askelon;
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.

“O mountains of Gilboa, let neither dew fall,
Nor rain be upon you, O fields of death!
For there was the shield of the mighty thrown aside,
The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.

“From the blood of the slain,
From the fat of the mighty,
The bow of Jonathan turned not back,
Nor empty returned the sword of Saul.

“Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
In life and death they were not divided;
Swifter than eagles were they,
They were stronger than lions.

“O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
Who clothed you in scarlet daintily,
Who adorned your garments with gold and jewels;
How are the mighty fallen in the midst of battle!

“O Jonathan! by your death am I mortally wounded,
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan!
You were exceedingly dear to me,
Your love was more marvelous to me than
the love of women!

“How have the mighty fallen,
And the weapons of war perished!” [II Sam. 1:17-27].

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

Even in the period of Saul we see a more organized attempt to observe religious practices and more definite religious ideals than in Judges; but a struggle between the power of God vested in the prophet and political power represented by the king had begun.

The fortunes of Israel in this early kingdom, while furnishing a necessary background, are not so important to the biblical writer as the delineation of the characters. "Saul failed religiously and, as a consequence, politically." So thinks the author. Ought *we* to give Saul more credit for the consolidation of Israel's army, and a pressure upon the Philistines which convinced them that Israel was a formidable foe. But must we not also agree with the author that personality is a more important factor in success than opportunity, and that a stronger religious integration of his life would have kept Saul in tune, and, so better able to solve his problems.

The personalities presented in the stories were important to the collector and to his readers because of their religious aspects. We must take this into account when estimating or using them.

Religion expressed in a personality in action is understood. Abstractly presented it gets nowhere. We shall expect to find, as we have seen in the cases of Samson and Saul, some biblical characters that are a warning rather than an example.

While these old stories are especially interesting to younger boys and girls, we realize that the Bible study of most adults has been scrappy and unsystematic. To review them, fitting them into the developing history and religious thought of the Hebrews, is a stimulating process. We thus

discover the roots of our own religion, growing and separating themselves from the habits and conceptions of the times. Even thus early we can observe that unselfishness and love, which are the essence of religion, integrate personality. Hate and selfishness as actively disintegrate and dissipate it.

In these days we are laying emphasis upon dramatization in religious education. It is useful because children and young people thus temporarily live in the lives of the characters. This statement is sufficient to suggest that Saul, Samson, Jephthah, and Jael should not be dramatized.

The process of restoring a person out of items scattered through many chapters and interwoven with details of other characters is a difficult one. Although this book is not designed to furnish the outlines for stories, a few are given as a guide to the reader in making his own. One must rigidly hold the idea that he is making a story of one character only. All others are subsidiary. In the following outline where no special reference is given the material is inferred from the general reading of the book. In cases where special references are given, although they may not be inclusive, they are sufficient to cover the point indicated. One must omit extensively in order that he may complete such a story as suggested in the outline within a half-hour or less.

Outlining the story of Saul.—Anointing by Samuel (I Sam. 9:1-6, 10-14; 9:18-10:1). Witches and wizards banished by the king, who rules under the advice of Samuel representing God (28:3b). Fighting Israel's battles with the Philistines and others (suggestions from 13:1-4; 14:20-24, 47, 48, 52; 15:1-9; 31:1-13). Displeasing Samuel by presuming to approach God with a sacrifice but without the sanction of Samuel (13:1-14; 14:35-39). Disobeying Samuel in regard to the spoil taken from the Amalakites (chap. 15). Saul's jealousy of David, the captain of his hosts, and an attempt to kill him (chap. 18). Pursuing David—a

simple statement without details including anger at Jonathan for defending David (chaps. 19-22). Death of Samuel (25:1). Only a mention of David's sparing Saul's life in the cave (chap. 24). Increasing fury and superstitious fear of David under the impression that God always circumvented his attempts to kill his imagined enemy. Facing a battle with Philistines and consumed by his superstitious fears, Saul consults the witch of Endor, who pronounces his doom (28:3-25). Unfit for battle, he falls on the field the following day and with him his sons. Remembered gratefully by the men of Jabesh-Gilead, the bodies are rescued and buried (31:1-13).

A teacher will recall that these are but outstanding points to be illuminated by the spirit in which they are told.

CHAPTER IV

DAVID, THE COURT FAVORITE, COMMANDER OF THE ARMIES, EXILE, KING, POET

THE FIRST AND SECOND BOOKS OF SAMUEL

WE NOW come to a very interesting series of stories clustering about David, the greatest single hero of Hebrew history. We must not approach this character with the presupposition inherited from past centuries picturing David as a maker of psalms, his name a synonym for righteousness. The story of David that we find in the books of Samuel is, however, that of a very human, vivid, ambitious, loyal, frequently kindly, sometimes chivalrous, deeply religious personality. Long considered the author of the major portion of the psalms collected in our Bible, it now becomes doubtful whether he made any considerable contribution to the poetry of Israel at all. Some students still attribute to him a few psalms, which contain the purest poetry to be found in the whole collection, among them the favorite Twenty-third. Others allow to him portions of certain nature psalms and others doubt his authorship of any. Certainly, he had a persuasive tongue, and he was reputed to be a musician. A man of physical qualities which attracted people to him and mental and spiritual qualities which were unusual, he was one of the occasional men in the world's history. His story, although idealized and made into an epic tale, reflects as we shall see the well-established opinion of later generations. His name and his character as a king were increasingly revered through the centuries. To Israel he was always the

ideal king. To a modern writer of fiction he would furnish a hero for a novel.

Although in the stories of David we find the life of his times reflecting rough ethical standards, and deeply superstitious ideals, occasionally we may note deliberate attempts to revise religious ideals to better fit new conditions. Especially do we see this in the realm of worship which is now settled so far as to be addressed to a resident rather than a nomadic God.¹

We find as yet no systematic history, but only groups of stories containing duplications and serious disarrangements. These are the oft-told stories of the people about their favorite hero.

David is introduced to us in three different stories: his anointing by Samuel in Bethlehem (I Sam. 16:1-13); as a musician charming away the melancholy moods of King Saul, who in these periods was felt to be under the influence of an evil spirit (16:14-23); and as a champion of the battlefield on which the Philistine warrior Goliath was slain (chap. 17). It is perfectly legitimate to use any of these stories, but they need not be regarded as consecutive or necessarily hanging together. According to tradition, David was the son of Jesse, and kept his father's sheep. This fact seems to be inferred in all the early stories and makes them particularly acceptable for little children. A customary experience in David's shepherd life makes an excellent story, but it must be created. David himself in his interview with Saul, in chapter 17, gives us the facts.

But David said to Saul,

"Your servant has been a shepherd with his father's flock; and when a lion or a bear would come and take a sheep out of the flock, I would go

¹ See I Sam. 26:20, indicating absence from the territory of Israel as absence from God.

out after him and attack him and deliver it from his mouth; and if he rose up against me, I would seize him by his beard and wound him and kill him. Your servant has slain both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, since he has taunted the battle-lines of the living God.”

“The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion, and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”

A charming semi-imaginary story can be constructed by using *one* of the occasions on which a bear, *or* one of the mountain lions, in which Palestine abounds, came upon David's flock when he was keeping his sheep far away from home.

Such imaginary stories, if they are kept within the circle of probability, are quite legitimate, especially with small children.²

As the story of David develops in the chapters that follow, there is much detail.³ A teacher “trying to get everything in” is liable to become a tedious narrator instead of an interesting and impressive story-teller. Perhaps, therefore, it would be best to make an outline of the features of the story as one goes, thus insuring a progressive interest, a climax, and some sort of emotional impact. Above all, it must be the David that appears in the text that emerges to view. It will be necessary to break the story into parts.

We may begin the first story with one or the other of the incidents of David's coming to the court. We shall note the

² One lesson-writer made the mistake of telling the story of a lion's visit quite effectively, and then, feeling that he had not done justice to the text, ended by saying, “And another day a bear came, but always David slew them.” He thus created an anticlimax in his story and dissipated the emotion it had engendered.

³ We omit the story of David's anointing by Samuel, as it probably arose after David became king rather than before. To leave it as it stands, necessitates David's knowledge, all through the pursuit by Saul, that he had *already* been chosen and anointed, which makes him an unreal character.

spontaneous affection of Jonathan for David, and such telling phrases as "He acted discreetly" and "He was well pleasing in the estimation of the people"—phrases so full of meaning that they should be used. The interest of the story is increased by details that are significant in creating a picture of the hero.

David had good success in all his undertakings, for the LORD was with him. So when Saul saw that he exercised *very good judgment*, he stood in dread of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before the people.

Recall in contrast Saul's impulsive temperament.

David is soon appointed over a portion of the army and fights the Philistines. The enthusiastic character of the reception on his return arouses Saul's anger, and we shall not forget to picture the women in their enthusiasm singing

Saul has slain his thousands,
But David his ten thousands.

Saul in a frenzy of jealousy seeks an opportunity to kill David, who is visiting him. Desiring to keep him under his eye, he offers David his daughter in marriage. (The conversation here is interesting. In telling stories anything that can be kept in the form of conversation, even if condensed from the text, is much more effective than when presented in indirect discourse.)

So Saul commanded his servants as follows:

"Communicate with David secretly and say, 'You see, the king is pleased with you and all his servants love you; now therefore make yourself the king's son-in-law.'"

The servants of Saul spoke these words in the ears of David.

"Is it an easy thing in your estimation to make one's self the king's son-in-law, and I a poor man and of humble station?" said David.

Saul's desire develops into a plot to bring about the death of David through the dangers incident to a strange dowry

which he asks. His fear of David becomes a superstition (chap. 18). David's reluctance to his marriage to the king's daughter is overcome, and as the king's son-in-law he becomes more and more popular. Jonathan, alarmed at Saul's menacing attitude, warns David to flee (chap. 19). Meantime he tries to change his father's attitude toward David and apparently succeeds so well that David is brought back to court and continues his successful raids upon the Philistines. Saul again in his wrathful jealousy attempts to kill David, not alone by throwing his spear at him but by instructing members of his household to take advantage of any opportunity to kill him. Michal, the wife of David, advises him to flee and saves his life by the interesting ruse of substituting an idol, well covered up in David's bed, while he escapes by a window. (The dialogue is vivid here.) He flees to his old friend Samuel.

Here we have a good ending for a story. Increasing emotions center about the fine bearing of David, the growing enmity of Saul, the interference of Jonathan, the plotting of Saul, leading up to the exciting moment when the house is surrounded and watched, and David is saved by the clever work of his wife. After that, one rests comfortably in the fact that his hero has found safety with Samuel, to whom he fled. By this time the sympathy of listeners will be thoroughly enlisted, and another story should follow at as early a date as possible in order that the emotional reaction may be carried over.

The next story may begin by noting that Saul quickly discovered to what refuge David had fled and sent messengers to take him. Here we have one of those curious phenomena in which the messengers of Saul are said to have been visited by the "spirit of God" so that they fell into prophetic ecstasies. This happened three times, and finally

Saul himself went to the sanctuary to find David and fell under the same ecstatic spell. This is a splendid example of traditional coloring emphasizing God's favorable attitude toward David and his disapproval of Saul. But to enlarge upon it would be a mistake. The natures of these two men with their opposite qualities are always overlooked by the biblical writer in favor of God's direct control of circumstances. We are struggling to see our characters as human and self-directing as people are today.

Apparently, David did not want to take any further chances, and we next find him seeking refuge with Jonathan (chap. 20), who seems not to have credited his father's renewed deadly pursuit of David. Jonathan assures his friend that he should come back to court, but promises to question King Saul as to what his real intent concerning David may be. At the feast of the new moon Jonathan seeks to defend the absence of his friend on so important an occasion and only excites his father's wrath still further.

Convinced now that the court is not a safe place for David, Jonathan reports his decision in the novel way described in the story, and David again flees.⁴ Again David seeks refuge at a sanctuary, this time at Nob, but with no intention of staying there (chaps. 21-22). Under pretense of a secret mission from the king, he obtains food and the sword of Goliath, which had been kept as a trophy at this place. Unfortunately for David, it happened that Saul's chief shepherd was that day at the sanctuary. David fled to one of the Philistine cities, but, being recognized there, he feigned madness and escaped, taking refuge in a cave on the border of his own land. In time there gathered about

⁴ This story in detail may have already been told in relation to Jonathan. If so, all details can be omitted here. If not, interesting dialogue will enliven the story of these clandestine meetings of David and Jonathan.

him in this region friends, relatives, and many of the indigent and embittered in the kingdom until there were several hundred men. With this company he went to Moab, taking his father and mother. He requested the king of Moab to keep them in safety until he should be able to give them a peaceful home, and then he returned to his own country. The report of his return seems to have put fear into the heart of Saul, and we find him (22:6) sitting under a sacred tree at a sanctuary, with a spear in his hand, holding a council of war. His speech discloses the fact that he fears the treachery of Jonathan.

“Hear now O Benjaminites! Will the son of Jesse also give to everyone of you fields and vineyards? Will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, that all of you have conspired against me, and there is no one that discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse, and none of you sympathizes with me, or discloses to me that my son has incited my servant against me as an enemy, as it is this day?” [22:7, 8].

He becomes excited when, at this point, the man who had seen David at the sanctuary at Nob reports the help that was there given to David by the priests. Characteristically, on the impulse of the moment, Saul sent for all the priests of that sanctuary and accused them of conspiracy. They protested that they did not know that David was fleeing from the king, but he commanded the immediate slaughter of all of them with their families (22:9-19) and destruction of their sanctuary. One priest escaped and found David, who took upon himself the blame for the tragedy, and adopted the refugee priest as his own (22:20-23). It is in little touches of this sort that we find our sympathy for David growing, together with a certain affection with which he seems to have inspired many.

David's army of disgruntled men and adventurers had

become quite large, said to have been six hundred men, and he on his own initiative undertook to fight the Philistines, who were robbing the threshing-floors at Keilah, a border town. As usual he was successful. But his priest Abiathar, after inquiring of God, assured him that he was not safe there, for the men of Keilah could not be trusted to protect him from Saul; so he and his men went wandering again. This time he lingered in the Desert of Ziph near Horesha. There he was visited by Jonathan, who assured him that Saul would not be able to find him, since he must be living a charmed life, under the protection of God, which would surely result in his being king of Israel, when Jonathan would be "as his right hand." He even claimed that Saul was already conscious of this destiny.

But the Ziphites betrayed the hiding-place of David, and again he fled. In the midst of his pursuit, when Saul had indeed discovered David's refuge and was ready to attack, he and his army were called off by news of a new Philistine raid. He repulsed the Philistines and returned to his pursuit of David now in the Desert of Engedi. This time he brought with him a larger army.

At this point we find difficulty in our text—two episodes so similar that to include them both (chaps. 24 and 26) would spoil our story. They were probably different versions of the same event.⁵ We shall choose the latter as continuing gathering momentum in the pursuit by Saul. The story is very graphic at this point. Conversation is important. David's hiding-place in the desert, having been reported to Saul, with his considerable army he marches down under cover of the hill of Hachilah. David evades him but is aware of all his movements, through spies who

⁵ Chap. 25 is an entirely unrelated episode.

report to him. We must not spoil the story by summarizing or abbreviating here. The graphic text should be used.

When he learned that Saul was coming straight on, David arose and came to the place where Saul was encamped. So David saw the place where lay Saul and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army; and Saul lay within the barricade, and the people were encamped round about him.

Then David spoke up and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, saying,

"Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp?"

"I will go down with you," said Abishai.

So David and Abishai came to the people by night; and there was Saul lying asleep within the barricade, with his spear thrust into the earth at his head; and Abner and the people were lying round about him.

"God has today delivered up your enemy into your hand," said Abishai to David. "Now therefore, I pray you, let me pin him to the earth with but one thrust of his own spear, and I shall have no occasion to repeat the blow, so far as he is concerned."

But David said to Abishai,

"Destroy him not; for who can lay his hand upon the LORD's anointed and be innocent?"

"As the LORD lives," said David, "either the LORD shall smite him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go down into the battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should put forth my hand against the LORD's anointed; but take now, I pray you, the spear that is at his head and the jug of water and let us go."

So David took the spear and the jug of water from Saul's head and they withdrew. No one saw it or knew it, neither did any awake; for they were all asleep because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them.

Thereupon David went over to the other side and stood on the top of a mountain at a safe distance, a great space being between them. Then David called to the people and to Abner, the son of Ner, saying,

"Will you not answer, Abner?"

Abner answered and said,

"Who are you that calls?"

So David said to Abner,

"Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came to destroy

the king your lord. This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, you are worthy of death, because you did not keep watch over your master, the LORD's anointed. See now where the king's spear is and the jug of water that was at his head."

Then Saul recognized David's voice and said,

"Is that your voice, my son David?"

"It is my voice, my lord, O king," said David.

"Why is my lord pursuing his servant," he said, "for what have I done, or of what evil am I guilty? Now therefore, I pray, let my lord the king listen to the words of his servant. If the LORD has stirred you up against me, let him be appeased by an offering; but if they be the sons of men, cursed be they before the LORD; for they have driven me out today, so that I have no share in the heritage of the LORD, saying, 'Go serve other gods.' Now therefore, may my blood not fall to the earth far removed from the presence of the LORD; for the king of Israel has come forth to seek my life, as one hunts a partridge in the mountains."

"I have sinned," Saul said, "return my son David, for I will do you no more harm, because my life was held sacred by you this day. I have acted foolishly indeed and have erred exceedingly."

Then David answered and said,

"Here is the king's spear! Now let one of the young men come over and get it. The LORD will recompense every man's righteousness and fidelity; for the LORD delivered you into my hand today, but I refused to stretch forth my hand against the LORD's anointed. Just as your life was highly valued in my sight today, so may my life be highly valued in the sight of the LORD, and may he deliver me out of every distress."

Then Saul said to David,

"Blessed are you my son David; you will certainly succeed in whatever you undertake."

So David went his way, while Saul returned to his place [26:6-25].

The closing sentence, "So David went his way and Saul returned to his place," is a quiet and effective ending to a story with high emotional value, for one feels that not the fate of two men but the fate of a kingdom hung in the balance. Here the story should end for the time being. Meanwhile, Saul's superstition that Israel's God is continually favoring David and opposing *him* increased.

Our next chapter takes David down into Philistia, where he offered himself and his army as paid soldiers to the Philistine chief Achish, who at once gave him the city of Ziklag, in which to dwell with his men and their families, a center from which he went out to fight with the Philistines against marauding neighbors.⁶

We follow David to Ziklag (chap. 30). David had allowed himself and his men to be taken by Achish into a battle against the Hebrews, but Achish, responding to the unfavorable criticisms of his men who feared to trust David, a Hebrew, in such an enterprise, sent David back to Ziklag. The story begins, "Now when David and his men arrived at Ziklag," and is quite clear with graphic and easily understandable conversation. It pictures David and his men in a grand fury so that he wept over the city which, in his absence, had been burned, and its people, including his own wives and children, and everything that was valuable in property, carried away by the raiders. Immediate pursuit sanctioned by a priest leads to the discovery and complete routing of the invaders. All property plus considerable additional spoil was recovered, and the captive women and children rescued. The story is valuable because it presents a revealing picture of David's sense of justice, in an incident of the victorious return. Certain men, a small company of two hundred in the text, had not actually participated in the rescue and plundering of the raider's camp. Too weary to fight after their campaign with the Philistines, they had rested, by David's orders, at the brook Besor. Triumphant-ly returning with those who actually did the fighting, David was confronted by some of the active company (the base

⁶ The story is again interrupted by the episode of Saul and the witch of Endor, already noted. Here the reader should bear in mind however that we are now telling the story of David, not the story of Saul.

and worthless ones, the text comments) with the proposition that those who remained by the brook were entitled to no share in the spoils. David's pronouncement at this point is classic, and was certainly well illustrated in our own World War. "As is the share of him who goes down into the battle, even so is his portion who remains with the baggage. They shall share and share alike." The comment follows: "And from that day forward he made it a statute and a law in Israel to this day." Thus a custom arose and finally became law. Here again is one of those pegs upon which we hang our admiration for David, a story of a "new deal" in warfare which can easily be taken out of its context and told as an independent short story.

Passing to the Second Book of Samuel, we read that, while at Ziklag, David learned of the death of Saul and Jonathan in battle. A graphic account of his ghastly reception of the Amalekite messenger who brought the news is given us (II Samuel, chap. 16). The dirge over Saul and Jonathan which follows, our author tells us, was written in the "Book of the Upright," of course at a later date. As remarked in a preceding chapter it is great poetry.

We do not need to go into the details of the long war between the followers of David and those of Saul, following upon his death. Unquestionably, David was ambitious and had had many indications in the attitude of large groups of people that he might be an acceptable king. The kingship was too new in Israel to demand the regular succession of the one remaining son of Saul. But, headed by Abner, one of Saul's followers, these wars went on for a long period, until his death, followed soon by the death of Ishbaal, the son of Saul. Again we find David strangely rewarding the people who brought him the good news, for as the bearer of news of the death of Saul was killed, so now the message

that Saul's son had been killed in his bed brought the reward of death to the two messengers. Interesting color of the times is found in these incidents, as well as the suggestion that David was an instinctive politician as well as a soldier.

His dream of the kingship was soon fulfilled. Representatives of several tribes came to him at Hebron and anointed him king, where he had his capital for several years. But with his usual good judgment he sought a more protected capital city, and made an attack on Jerusalem which was occupied by the Jebusites, a still unconquered bit of Palestinian territory. He was successful in capturing the city, and there he established Jerusalem as his capital, and it remains the chief city of Palestine until the present day. (Here is a good place to end our second story.)

The reign of David centering in Jerusalem, which was already a walled city, was characterized by immediate steps toward the reorganization of his court. Nothing is said of any destruction of inhabitants of the city, and David apparently strengthened his position by marrying representatives of Jerusalem families. Wars with the Philistines, however, continued, as they were stimulated to further attack by the increasing power of David, on whose side God is always represented to be.⁷ In these early years God is characteristically called the "Lord of Hosts," that is, of armies (7:27; 8:1-18).

This brings us to a religious problem which confronted David. The God of armies was a marching God. The Ark had for some time been out of use because of its capture by

⁷ In 5:24 we have an interesting example of the belief that God spoke through the trees. David is instructed, "When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees (the rustling of the leaves) make haste, for at that moment the Lord has gone forth before you to fall upon the camp of the Philistines."

the Philistines. It had supposedly brought plagues of all sorts upon the Philistines as they had carted it about from city to city, trying to find a place where it would behave properly. But at last the superstitious fears of the Philistines had been too much for them, and they had made a new cart and attached to it two cows which had never previously been yoked. Placing the Ark on this cart, they had sent it off, with a special offering of gold. They said that if the cattle went back to Hebrew territory, leaving their calves which had been taken from them, then they would know that it was the Ark which had brought them all their difficulties; but, if the cattle remained in Philistine territory, they would know that their difficulties had been accidental. Fortunately for Israel and the Ark, the cows, followed by observing Philistines, made straight for Hebrew territory, where men reaping their wheat harvests in the valley over the border, came rejoicing to meet it. The men of Bethshemesh reported the return of the Ark to dwellers in Kirjath-jearim, who sent a priest to take charge of it. It was brought as far as Kirjath-jearim and placed in the house of Abinadab. There it had been for many years (I Sam. 5:1—7:2).

Now David was seeking permanency in his city. He apparently had higher ideals than those of his predecessors in regard to the future of Israel; but he was equally superstitious in regard to the Ark. Possibly he planned to use it in prospective wars, for he had dreams of increased territory, but certainly he desired its presence in his capital city, and its establishment there in a royal sanctuary attached to his house, for his own use and that of his royal household. He organized an expedition to bring the Ark up to Jerusalem. This is a unique story (II Samuel, chap. 6). It can well be taken out of its context and, with a simple historical intro-

duction, used as a single story; or it may be incorporated in a series of stories of the Ark. The *fact* of this installation of the Ark, whether the story is told or not, should be included in any story of David, for it is one indication of his religious nature and his conception of one of his religious obligations. He felt that the presence of his God was necessary for the success of his kingdom, and the Ark, the ancient symbol of God's presence, must be within the city and close to his own house. He was even so persistent in this purpose that when, owing to an accident, the first expedition failed, and the Ark was left in superstitious fear in the house of a pious Hebrew halfway to Jerusalem, he only postponed the task. A second and more elaborate expedition followed after a safe interval, and the story shows us David himself throwing off his kingly garments and joining in the abandon of the whirling religious dance, to the accompaniment of which the Ark is brought into the city in safety, escorted by a great throng. The welfare of Jerusalem and of its king was thus assured.

In telling this picturesque story of the bringing of the Ark to Jerusalem with instrumental music, religious dancing, and songs, one can visualize the entry through the city gates; welcoming bands of singers within or upon the walls and those accompanying the Ark singing antiphonally such a psalm as the Twenty-fourth, which would be arranged as follows:

CHOIR I

The earth is the LORD's and its fulness,
The world and those who dwell therein.

RESPONSE, CHOIR II

For he founded it upon the seas,
And established it upon the ocean-currents.

CHOIR I

Who can ascend into the hill of the LORD?
And who can stand in his holy place?

RESPONSE, CHOIR II

He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who has had no desire for falsehood,
And has not sworn to a lie.

CHOIR I

He will receive a blessing from the LORD,
And justification from the God of his deliverance

RESPONSE, CHOIR II

This is the generation of those who search for him,
Who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

CHOIR I

Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift yourselves up, O ancient doors.
That the king of glory may come in!

RESPONSE, CHOIR II

Who, then, is the king of glory?
The LORD strong and mighty,
The LORD mighty in battle!

CHOIR I

Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift yourselves up, O ancient doors,
That the king of glory may come in!

RESPONSE, CHOIR II

Who, then, is the king of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
He is the king of glory!

The great gates close, and the Ark is within the city which becomes thereby and ever thereafter remains the Holy City.

The king had now another religious adviser, an official prophet, a "speaker for God." It was to this prophet

Nathan that David went for advice in certain important matters. A priest with an ephod was no longer sufficient. A priest could offer sacrifices and conduct ceremonies whether trifling or on a large scale, but the prophet was the man who understood God. David's desire to live in harmony with his God was sincere. His was a religious temperament, getting satisfaction from the higher things, music, poetry, fair-mindedness, and evaluated conduct.

Following the chapter on the bringing-up of the Ark to Jerusalem, we have the story of David's desire to build a house, that is, a real temple for God. We do not know just why he did not eventually do this. Perhaps he may not have been certain that God would like a temple. He had been a mountain and a desert God, and only recently had become associated in the current religion with agriculture. He was still also a Lord of armies. Later writers have surmised that because David had been a man of war it was not considered fitting that he should build a house for God. But that seems a little inconsistent. It is more likely that David was uncertain as to what God might enjoy or approve. Something of the argument which might well have been in his mind is seen in 7:1-11, 25-29. It is as if he said, "O, Lord, I would willingly build you a house but you are a God of tents. You have never asked a house and I am fearful that you would not want one. I feel sure that you have been with me and that you are helping me to build a kingdom and to reign in it, and that I and my descendants will be established as its rulers forever, with thy blessing. As to a house for thee I will wait for light." No doubt with a long look ahead he felt assured that the permanency of the kingdom would in time bring the house, perhaps to be built by his son and successor, as the prophet afterward interpreted his mind.

With a court prophet, Nathan, with Joab, a general commander of his army and subcommanders, with a recorder of kingdom affairs, with a scribe and two additional authorized priests all mentioned by name (8:15-18), we feel that David has accomplished much. But more significant is the sentence, "And David administered justice and righteousness for all his people." We see how differently our author regarded David as compared with his predecessor, Saul, for no word was given us of how Saul governed his people. He was a military leader rather than a king. As we read of the continued wars of David, we realize, however, that his kingship was not retained without a hard struggle and the conquest of many enemies (10:1-19).

In the midst of our account is inserted here an interesting story which in later theology was held to be significant in the decline of David's influence. What the real facts are in regard to that we do not know, since we cannot apply to David the ethical standards of today. This story of the episode of Bathsheba gives us also the direct lineage of Solomon, who later succeeded his father. As compared with modern fiction, as well as a good deal of history as written in modern times, this is a very simple story. David's court was already well supplied with wives and concubines, but from the roof of his house, where he lay upon his couch or walked to and fro at will, he saw a very beautiful woman bathing. He surmised that she was the wife of one of his chief military men. He sent for her. Their relations were such that a child was conceived. It is probable that people of these days lived by custom rather than by law, and certainly in some other ancient nations kings were above the law. If the Tables of the Law were within the Ark, as many doubt, we have no story of the use of these in any public way. But apparently here was a violation of a cus-

tom, and an act for which Uriah the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba, might call David into question. David, therefore, tried to hide his responsibility by urging Uriah, who is evidently one of the king's guard, to return to his house and live with his wife. Uriah, faithful to his duty as a guard, unconsciously evaded David's scheming, and something more drastic was necessary. The story gives us a letter written to Joab, the captain of the armies, containing instructions to place Uriah in the forefront of a coming battle and immediately bring back news of what happens. Tidings of the death of Uriah were soon brought to David, and, after a due period of mourning, Bathsheba was brought to the court, where she became his acknowledged wife. But the son who was born as a result of their illegitimate union died.

Meanwhile, however, we have a very interesting light upon the matter, through the story of the visit to David of the prophet Nathan. The king's moral welfare, which involved his relation to God, was apparently the concern of the prophet. Nathan appeared before David one day, while again possibly resting on his housetop, and related to him the following story:

"There were two men in a certain city, the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man owned very many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing but a single little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He reared it and it grew up with him and with his children. It would eat from his food and drink from his cup, and it lay in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he refused to take from his own flock or his own herd to make ready for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him" [12:1-6].

David, in righteous anger that one of the citizens of his kingdom should do such an unworthy act, swore that the rich man was "worthy of death" and that he himself would com-

pel the rich man to restore to the poor man the value of the lamb seven fold, "because he did this and because he showed no pity." Nathan responded, "Thou art the man." He then pronounced on David a judgment, predicting the never ceasing presence of the sword in his kingdom. David, who might well have had a disturbed conscience on account of his virtual murder of Uriah, professed deep repentance, and at the subsequent death of the child mourned long and deeply. He, of course, interpreted this death as a punishment for his sin, for which he expressed sincere repentance. The Fifty-first Psalm has been associated with this event and attributed to David by long tradition. The story ends, however, with the statement of the birth of another son of Bathsheba, Solomon, "with whom the Lord was well pleased."

Perhaps it is not easy to use this story of David's betrayal of his faithful soldier, but at least it gives us a feeling of the increasing complications of advancing social life in Israel, following the establishment of an elaborate court life. It also helps us to appreciate the function of the prophet in this early kingdom.

Our story was prepared by a prophet or a group of prophets, and their interest in the moral and religious life was supreme and inseparable from political life. David had done nothing more than might easily have been done by ancient monarchs of his time. But there was something in the religion of the Hebrews which could not reconcile his conduct with their idea of justice and the favor of God. It is significant that the prophet-historian passes almost immediately to the misfortunes of his hero.

First we have a story of one of David's sons, a very handsome young man and a favorite with all the people. The story, a long one, runs through six chapters (13-19), from which one is obliged to select. Absalom, a younger son and

an utterly selfish man, is the cause of the trouble. We are not quite sure that the episode of Amnon's relation with his sister Tamar was, as it seemed to be, the real cause of Absalom's anger and therefore of what happened later (chap. 13). It looks as if Absalom found in this a desired excuse to kill Amnon, his brother, as a first step in getting rid of all his brothers in order that he might seize the throne. In fact, a report that Absalom had killed all the king's sons came to David, but this report was contradicted by the arrival of the brothers themselves, with the exception of Amnon, who was indeed dead. Absalom meanwhile had fled to Geshur. Evidently, Absalom was a favorite son, for we are told that the king "pined" for him. Joab, the commander of the army, through a ruse, succeeded in getting a "wise woman" to visit the king and convey to him, by means of a clever story, Joab's opinion that the king should bring Absalom back, which he soon did. (The conversation throughout this story is interesting.) Absalom was brought back, but not to the palace. He was required to live in a house of his own, and for a period of years was not allowed to see the king. This did not suit Absalom's idea as a son of the royal house. Several children had been born to him, and he felt himself to be a man of distinction. By setting a field on fire, he succeeded in attracting the attention of Joab, to whom he made bitter complaint as to his treatment by the king. A meeting with the king followed, and the kiss of reconciliation was given to Absalom.

We are not surprised to find, in the following chapter (15:1-6), that Absalom was soon actively organizing a revolt. He prepared the way for it by cultivating the friendship of those who came to receive judgment from the king, assuring them that, if the case were in *his* hands, they certainly would receive justice. The conversations are vivid.

At last, when the hour seemed ripe, Absalom, with the permission of the king, who believed him to be fulfilling a vow made in his early exile, went down to Hebron, the old capital of the country, taking with him two hundred men unaware of his real purpose. Absalom had already sent his messengers throughout the tribes, instructing them to proclaim him king "at the sound of the trumpet." Among those who joined him were some who were close to David, and in increasing numbers. David may have already lost some of his prestige. At least in ignorance of how widespread the rebellion might be, he lost his courage and fled. The story of the flight is stirring:

Moreover Absalom sent and called Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh, where he was offering sacrifices; and the conspiracy was strong, for the people with Absalom kept on increasing.

Therefore when a messenger came to David, saying,

"The heart of the men of Israel has gone after Absalom,"

David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem,

"Up and away; for otherwise there will be for us no escape from Absalom. Make haste to be off, lest he quickly overtake us and set evil in motion against us and put the city to the sword."

Then the king's servants said to the king,

"In accordance with all that my lord the king decides, your servants are ready."

So the king went out and all his household after him. But the king left behind ten concubines to keep the palace. The king and all his attendants who followed after him went forth and halted at the last house, while all the people marched past him; and all the Cherethites and all the Pelethites and all the men of Ittai the Gittite, six hundred men who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king.

Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite,

"Why will you also go with us? Return and remain with the king; for you are a foreigner and an exile from your own home. You came but yesterday and shall I today cause you to wander with us, while I go wherever I may? Return and lead back your fellow-countrymen with you; and the LORD will show you kindness and faithfulness."

But Ittai answered the king and said,

"As the LORD lives and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be—whether for death or for life—there will your servant be."

Wherefore David said to Ittai,

"Go and pass on."

So Ittai the Gittite passed on with all his men and all the children that were with him.

Moreover all the countryside was in loud lamentation as all the people were passing by. While the king stood in the Kidron valley, all the people were passing on before him by way of the olive tree which is in the desert. There too were both Zadok and Abiathar with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God, and they halted the ark of God until all the people had entirely passed out of the city. Then the king said to Zadok and Abiathar,

"Carry back the ark of God into the city and let it remain in its place. If I shall find favor in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me back, and show me both it and his abode. But if he say, 'I have no delight in you,' then here I am, let him do to me as seems good in his sight" [15:13-2; the narrative continues to 16:14].

Ahitophel, one of David's own counselors, was among the rebels, but David was not without a wise counselor in a friend, Hushai. With him David arranges means of communication, so that he will know what goes on in the city into which Absalom has just entered. Absalom was trapped into a foolish move by Hushai, working in the interests of David. Instead of an easy pursuit of David, Absalom finds himself drawn into a battle with his father's followers who are under the experienced leadership of Joab. The result is defeat, and an accident to Absalom, who is caught from his horse by the entanglement of his hair in the branches of a tree, as he passes under it. Found thus he is put to death by Joab. The sad old king, who had besought Joab to spare the life of Absalom, received the news of his son's death in the city of Mahanaim, where he had taken refuge.

A modern historian would not have incorporated at such

length and in such detail the story of the effect upon David of the news of Absalom's death which follows (chaps. 18 and 19). It probably became a favorite story with the people, enhancing the reputation of David as a human father as well as a king. Perhaps the story of Absalom may help some young people who are inclined to sacrifice loyalty to ambition. If a story with such a problem is needed, this one certainly has the emotional stimulus.

The remainder of the book does not add much to our conception of David. He returned to Jerusalem, but not to the same undivided affection of his people as that which preceded the revolt of Absalom. Only a few more notes are given us. The faithful Joab, probably because of his part in the death of Absalom, is displaced by Amasa as the leader of the army, whose death at the hand of Joab is recorded. Also we learn of a revolt under Sheba, a Benjaminite, of Saul's territory. The closing chapters of the book give us an appendix in which we find a different story from that which we have already read of the rescue of the bones of Saul and Jonathan; a second story of the death of Goliath; a memorial hymn of praise; and a late poem supposedly containing the last words of David but having the perfunctory tone of a poet laureate. Buried in a list of David's great men we come upon the little story of the Bethlehem well, which furnishes us another clue to David's popularity and the appreciation of his friends.

After recounting some of the exploits of "The Thirty," evidently a famous group of David's soldiers, the exploits of three of them, called "The Three," are described, and the incident is recounted as a tribute to them. It is equally illuminating with respect to David's quick response to affection.

These are the names of David's heroic followers: Ishbaal the Hachmonite, who was the leader of the Three; he raised aloft his spear over eight hundred slain at one time. Next to him among the three heroes was Eleazar, the son of Dodi, the son of the Ahohite. He was with David at Pasdammim when the Philistines were gathered there for battle. But when the Israelites withdrew, he arose and attacked the Philistines until his hand was weary and was as if grown fast to the sword. So the LORD brought about a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to strip the slain. Next to him was Shammah, the son of Agee, a Hararite. The Philistines were gathered together at Lehi; and there was a plot of ground full of lentils. But when the people fled from the Philistines, he took his stand in the midst of the plot and defended it and slew the Philistines. So the LORD brought about a great victory.

Now three of the Thirty went down to the rock to David to the cave of Adullam while the camp of the Philistines was pitched in the Valley of Rephaim. David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was at the same time in Bethlehem. Moreover David longed earnestly and said,

"Oh that someone would give me a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem that is at the gate!"

So the three heroes broke through the camp of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was at the gate, and took it and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it, but poured it out to the LORD. And David said,

"Far be it from me, O LORD, that I should do this! It is the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives."

Therefore he would not drink it [23:8-17].

Some personal stories which would have interrupted our story are treated with affectionate hands. For one of these we turn back to David's life as a refugee in the wilderness when he was hiding from Saul. In this story we shall recognize in David the spirit of a gentleman. In outline it runs as follows (I Samuel, chap. 25).

David with his men, living on the contributions of the countryside, had doubtless helped themselves to food when the occasion arose, and, like all raiding bands, they felt

themselves justified in doing so. He was in the vicinity of what might be called in modern times a rich man's ranch. Nabal, the possessor of thousands of sheep and goats, was known to David, who had been careful in his contacts with the shepherds of Nabal, treating them well and having due regard for their property. In other words, he might have helped himself to sheep from their flocks but had not done so.

Hearing that Nabal was shearing his sheep, and knowing this would be an occasion for festivities where there would be plenty to eat, David sent a messenger to Nabal suggesting that a contribution of food would be acceptable. Nabal, a "rough and uncouth" man, was churlish. He pretended not to know David and repudiated any obligation to furnish food for his men. The report angered David. The only fitting reply to it must be the sword and seizure, and the band led by David started out "breathing fire." Abigail, one of the wives of Nabal, described as having "good sense and fair to look upon," learned from one of the young men in her household of the way in which David's messengers had been treated. The servant also added his testimony as to David's protection of Nabal's shepherds in the wilderness. Abigail was not ignorant of David's importance, though a refugee from Saul. She acted wisely and quickly. Such a return for the consideration of David would never do. She must avert the catastrophe which must surely and shortly come to the house of Nabal from such a powerful man. She at once proceeded to prepare a great present of food. Keeping her plans secret from Nabal, she herself, riding in dignity upon an ass, accompanied the young men who carried the offering. Meeting David on his revengeful way, she dismounted, bowed herself to the ground, and humbly besought a listening ear. She scouted the folly of her

husband, claiming that if *she* had seen the young men they would have been amply supplied. Then with flattering words she assured David that she believed him to be "fighting the wars of the Lord." She predicted for him a great future, tactfully suggesting, however, that for so great a man to be obliged to endure a qualm of conscience, or a burden of remorse, because of the shedding of the blood of Nabal's household, would be a pity. Something in David responded to the subtle flattery and the suppliant attitude of the beautiful woman. At all events, he praised God for having restrained him from harming her household. He assured her that, had it not been for her visit, every soul of it would have been destroyed, and he bade her go in peace. When, in the morning, she told the drunken Nabal what she had done, he suffered a stroke and died. News was taken to David, and in due time messengers came to Abigail from David seeking her as a wife for himself. A nice little love story full of local color and exceedingly natural for the times.

We have also omitted to say anything about David's anointing as having a bearing upon the study of David as a personality.⁸ It is charming as a story, but many of the acts and attitudes of David could not be understood if David from his early youth had known with certainty that he was to be Israel's king. Just as in the case of Samuel, we had a story of his boyhood, so in that of David there is the story of his youth, pleasant to tell, but to be used as a story and to be omitted from any great picture of David as a warrior, a courtier, or a king.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

The character of our material for study is still informal, sometimes almost anecdotal, fact, story, legend, theology—

⁸ See p. 49 n.

all combining in a vivid picture of the times, presented for the enlightenment of the people of *their own* times by the religious leaders who prepared them.

After the study of David we can better appreciate how in later years it came about that David's kingdom rather than the grander one of Solomon was regarded as symbolic of the ideal kingdom. A "king like David" often expressed the yearning of the people long after the kingdom had perished and hope was centered on a new one. It was, except for that of Solomon, the undivided kingdom and was approved of God, while Solomon's was not. We have seen David's hand in important beginnings, political, social, religious, and literary. He was the original genius, Solomon the imitator.

We realize that even in these early times certain moral standards were becoming fixed, and social pressure demanded their observance. In social pressure we include God, for the old idea of a people's kinship with its God was even stronger because God had of his own will adopted the Hebrews and bound the relationship by a covenant. There was no accident about it. The prophets rather than wizards or necromancers and the like were his spokesmen. Such were good enough for other gods but not for the Lord of Israel. It is time for us to take account of the fact that with each passing generation the Hebrew conception of God and his requirements was gaining moral quality, and grosser ideas were being sloughed off. We have seen the passing of the idea of a desert God into that of a God of armies. Now his interest was coming to be seen as in the moral realm.

Although we cannot be certain that David wrote many of the psalms that we now have, we can be sure that he would favor such forms of religious expression in his royal sanctuary and would encourage poets and musicians. He would

be likely even to form a small usable collection of religious songs which would become the beginning of the present Psalter, into which later would be drawn religious poetry of Hebrews through all the ages. No wonder that in common parlance we have spoken of the "Psalms of David" as including the whole collection. It was natural, but we are trying to learn to be discriminating.

We must not forget in our summary those religious leaders who selected and edited these records. Do we see that they too are growing in idealism and are more selective in their representation of God and his requirements? Was it only because of the outreaching of men's minds and hearts that the conception of God was becoming more moral, or was it rather that certain types of men afforded better avenues for the working of God's spirit in human life? If the latter, what a challenge to teachers. To mold human beings who shall become worthy of serving as channels through which the mind of God may flow freely into the mind of man and so out into human conduct—what an opportunity!

Now how shall we use the material to best advantage? First, in story-telling, constantly trying to enable our pupils to see each personality as a whole—making our stories live.

Then by improving our stories artistically, giving due regard to background, selection of materials, and emotional climax, stopping as well as beginning at the right point. Again, by avoiding moralizing, letting the characters speak for themselves by using the direct method of conversation when feasible, and in selecting the best elements of the story, we may remind ourselves that we are doing just what the prophets did, selecting and presenting for a purpose.

Here also is effective material for dramatization: such

stories as David and Goliath, the anointing of David (as a story that used to be told of him when he was king), sparing the life of Saul and taking his spear and cruse, the friendship of David and Jonathan, the story of David and Abigail, the new law for division of the spoil, bringing up the Ark to Jerusalem, and any others which help to enhance the character of David in any of its valuable aspects.

For older boys and girls and for adults there may be great discussions of questions of ethics rising out of the stories. Comparison may be made with modern ethical standards and the reason for differences considered.

Finally, the simple realization of just seeing clearly that a great personality has driving power will compel us to work for vividness, clarity, and appreciation, and thus we shall stimulate others to see that, then as now, the world moves forward on the shoulders of great personalities, and in them lies an inspiration for people of today.

CHAPTER V

POLITICS VERSUS RELIGION: SOLOMON, AHAB, ELIJAH, ELISHA

THE FIRST AND SECOND BOOKS OF KINGS

THE books of First and Second Kings, which we shall now investigate, purport to be the stories of the kingdom of Israel from the death of David to the ending of the kingdom in captivity in Babylon, and the wandering of a remnant to Egypt. We must not, however, think of these books as real historical writing. They are a collection of annals from public and private sources. The Book of the Records of Solomon, evidently biographical, the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, and the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah are referred to by title, as sources upon which the editor has drawn.¹ It is quite likely that each of the greater kings left his memoirs, and there might thus be books on the "Acts of Ahab," or the "Acts of Omri." There is also a collection of Elijah narratives which shows care in arrangement, and a collection of Elisha stories which is not chronological, even quite miscellaneous. Near the end are chapters which are duplicated in, or taken from, the Book of Isaiah. All these accounts are presented in a running editorial framework of comment.

If our purpose was to acquire an adequate knowledge of Hebrew history, we would use as our text some volume which shows thorough research into the history of the Hebrews, not through the biblical text alone, but with the aid

¹ I Kings 11:41; 14:19, 29.

of complete studies of its contemporary history, ancient monuments, the product of excavations, etc. But we are seeking to discover how we may gain an appreciative enjoyment of the Bible and how we can use it in religious education. We therefore include only so much of the history as will enable us to see the general movements and the growth of social and religious idealism. Through these we hope to gain the emotional impact of contact with the characters in the story. Thought must have grown through persons, inspired or otherwise, and through the study of persons we shall see it develop.

In this First Book of Kings, we first give attention to Solomon, the son of David and of Bathsheba. He was named for the throne by his father, but much blood was shed in clearing from his path an aspiring older brother, several people against whom his father held ancient grudges, as well as others who might have proved troublesome. The account reads interestingly in a modern translation. Solomon early established friendly relations with Egypt by marrying a daughter of the Pharaoh.² He immediately commenced building operations on a palace and a sanctuary in Jerusalem, also a new wall about the city. We are informed that he was accustomed to worship elaborately at the high places, especially at Gibeon, rather than in the simple style of his father. He required a new royal sanctuary which would correspond in grandeur to the new palace and the greater city. We are assured, however, that Solomon "worshiped the Lord," we infer even at the high places which were perhaps old Baal sanctuaries.

Our author tells us that in a dream the king saw himself with a noble aim—to rule wisely and with justice. He was assured not only of these qualities but of riches, long life, and honor. How far did his dream come true?

² I Kings, chaps. 2 and 3.

Testimony as to Solomon's wisdom follows, in that familiar little story of the two mothers bringing a living and a dead child, for the king's decision as to which each belonged. By his command that the living child be divided by a sword and half given to each, the real mother is quickly discovered (3:16-28). Shrewdness he certainly possessed. Wisdom in those days, however, had a special meaning. The "wise men" coined sayings out of human experience, which were pungent and easily remembered. Solomon obtained a great reputation for ability to originate and gather together such sayings, and in that sense he was a "wise" man. His unusual knowledge of nature is also praised (4:29-34). These things are interesting because they show us what one might expect in a clever man with a mind open to culture a thousand years before Christ in Palestine.

He was not troubled with serious wars, and with his father's ability to organize he had a better chance to build up his kingdom and to develop the arts of peace. His cabinet contained about the same officers as that of David, but with two significant additions, Ahishar over the "house" and Adoniram over the "forced labor." He thoroughly organized the entire kingdom, dividing it into twelve districts and appointing twelve officers, each one of whom was responsible for the support, for one month in the year, of the king's now elaborate household. The means for this levy the officer was to secure from the territory which was assigned to him. This seems a wise and simple way of maintaining the establishment for the needs of which we get some hint in the following:

Judah and Israel were as the sand which is by the sea for multitude; they were continually eating and drinking and making merry. Solomon was the ruler over all the kingdoms from the River even to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and continued to serve Solomon all the days of his life.

Solomon's provision for one day was thirty kors of fine flour, and sixty kors of meal, ten fat cattle and twenty pasture fed cattle and a hundred sheep, besides harts and gazelles and roebucks and fatted fowls. For he had dominion over everything beyond the River, from Tiphseh even to Gaza, over all the kings beyond the River. And he had peace on all sides round about him, so that Judah and Israel dwelt in safety from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his own vine and fig tree, all the days of Solomon. Now Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen.

These officers supplied provisions for King Solomon and for all who came to King Solomon's table, each in his month. They fell short in nothing. Also barley and straw for the horses and the swift steeds they brought to the place where it should be, each according to his assignment.³

But all this new order meant systematic "taxation without representation," a thing which Israel had not yet known. When we think of it from that point of view, we look for trouble. Then there was the building of the temple. Vast numbers of men had to be sent to Tyre, with whose king, Hiram, contracts were made for timbers, cedar and cypress, to be built into rafts and sent down by sea, payment to be made in wheat, oil, and olives raised by the Hebrews. A huge levy of forced laborers quarried stone. There was a tradition that "neither hammer nor ax nor any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built," all such work being done at the quarries (5:1—6:10). What builders these ancient Orientals were!

But all this glory does not blind the eyes of the prophet who tells the story, for he claims that this magnificent temple will be acceptable to God only on one condition—that

³ The stables in which Solomon's "swift steeds" were cared for have only recently been discovered by archeologists, testifying to the king's commerce in horses and the ample accommodations which he provided for them. In order to realize the rapidity of Israel's expansion in territory, wealth, social life, and even international relations we should recall the kingdom under Saul. Even under David it had been a military state.

of the conformity of the king's conduct to the demands of God. Religion without morality would be abhorrent to him (6:11-12). After a long account of the ceremonies of dedication, this fact is again emphasized and accompanied by a threat (9:1-9). After surveying increasing power and glory evidenced in buildings, fleets, mines, horse-trading, many foreign wives, and extravagant living, we come suddenly upon the fact that Solomon, now an old man, had *not* "pleased the Lord" because he worshiped the gods of the nations with which he had dealings. Behind this statement we see the story of foreign alliances through marriages and trade, the introduction of foreign customs, and the discontent of oppressed subjects. Solomon's props and those of the kingdom were falling. While the prophetic writer attributes the decline to God's displeasure, we see the paths by which it came.

Yet the Hebrews owed much to Solomon. The City of David and the Temple of Solomon held them together for hundreds of years, furnishing the basis for idealistic dreams always centering about these two. The policies of Solomon, however, had created restlessness among the people unaccustomed as they were to systematic or severe taxation, and the whole of northern Israel revolted from his son and successor, Rehoboam, upon his refusal to lighten their taxes. This revolt had the approval of the prophets and was believed in later centuries to have been predicted by them. We would say "incited" (I Kings 11:26-41). At all events Jeroboam the leader of the northern group, had stirred Solomon's anger, when he was at the head of the king's "forced-labor" division. He had fled to Egypt and remained there until called back by the rebellious party after the death of Solomon. He was chosen king of the revolting northern tribes, leaving only Judah to Rehoboam, who,

contemptuously replying to a plea for more consideration, followed the advice of his younger counselors.

Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men who had stood before Solomon his father, while he was still alive, saying,

“How do you advise me to reply to this people?”

They spoke to him, saying,

“If you will be a servant to this people today and will serve them, and when you answer them, speak kindly to them, then they will be your servants forever.”

But he rejected the counsel of the old men which they had given him, and took counsel with the young men, who had grown up with him and who were his companions. So he said to them.

“What do you advise that we reply to this people, who have spoken to me saying, ‘Lighten the yoke that your father laid upon us?’”

Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying,

“Thus shall you say to this people who have said to you, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, but do you lighten our yoke’; thus shall you say to them: ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins! And now, whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions!’”

So when Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king commanded, saying, “Return to me the third day,” the king answered them harshly, and rejected the counsel of the old men which they offered him. So he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying,

“My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.”

Now when all Israel saw that the king had not listened to them, the people replied to the king, saying,

“What portion have we in David? Yea, we have no heritage in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! see now to your own house, O David!”

So the Israelites went to their tents.

But Rehoboam reigned over the Israelites who dwelt in the cities of Judah. Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death; whereupon King Rehoboam

leaped into his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David down to this day.

Now as soon as all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. None, except the tribe of Judah alone, remained loyal to the house of David [I Kings 12:6-20].

Jeroboam made his capital at Tirzah. He had no temple. The northern tribes could not go to Jerusalem for worship, yet they must have sanctuaries. The story of their selection and embellishment as well as wide distribution is given us (12:25-33). Jeroboam had been favored by the prophets. He intended to be assiduous in promoting the religion of Israel's God. But these old sanctuaries had probably long been used for the worship of miscellaneous gods and the prophets seem to have held their use against Jeroboam in all the centuries following. At two of these centers we find specific mention of his use of the calf⁴ as a symbol of God. We can see his point of view. He could not have the Ark. He felt the necessity of some material symbol. But the prophets saw in it all an easy road to idolatry and the complete confusion of the worship of the Lord with that of the Canaanitish gods. They brought about the downfall of the house of Jeroboam in the reign of his son and successor, Nebat.

Our text has now become more difficult, for it contains narratives of both the northern and the southern kingdoms interwoven. We shall pass over the period incident to the settling-down of the two kingdoms, and take up our story at the accession of an important king of northern Israel, Omri,

⁴ Tradition probably carried the bull cult back to the time of Moses. It did not mean to Jeroboam or the people of the North abandonment of the Lord, but a use of the bull as a symbol, common among Semitic peoples (see O. E. Oesterly and T. H. Robinson, *A History of Israel*, Vol. I: *From the Exodus to A.D. 135* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932], p. 278).

already the commander of the army and now elected king. He established himself successfully and reigned twelve years. He bought the "Mountain of Samaria" and made it his capital. This is significant, for Samaria remained the capital of northern Israel until its destruction by the Assyrian army and the fall of the northern tribes in 721 B.C.⁵ Monumental records refer to the "House of Omri" or "Sons of Omri."⁶ Evidently he was a sufficiently strong king to impress his personality upon the greater nations—possibly northern Israel's strongest king. Our author, however, because of his religious purpose, allows to his reign only eight verses.

With his son Ahab we are more closely concerned, for, in connection with the records of Ahab, we find the stories of one of the most picturesque figures in Old Testament history, the prophet Elijah. Through these stories we are able to construct not only an interesting biographical picture of a prophet and a king but also to gain an appreciation of religious conditions in the northern kingdom. The prophet-writer tells us in connection with the fact of Ahab's suc-

⁵ The palace of Omri has been excavated in recent years. It is many roomed, built upon solid rock with foundations sunk in the rock. It is connected by a tunnel with a later addition, built by King Ahab, the son of Omri, for his own royal palace, and Jeroboam II made still further large additions. It was chiefly of yellow limestone quarried from the mount upon which it was built. Occasional rooms, cut into the solid rock itself upon a lower level, are found, perhaps for baths or pools. City walls of this period have also been uncovered. Excavations on this site have been conducted by Harvard University and the British School of Archaeology and Hebrew and Palestine Exploration Fund in conjunction with Harvard.

⁶ The Moabite stone records the fact that Omri, king of Israel, and his son after him, oppressed Moab taking away some of her cities for which Moab fought later and recovered. This full inscription may be found in George A. Barton's *Archaeology of the Bible* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1933).

cession to the throne, upon the death of his father, that he "walked in the sins of" the first Jeroboam. Absolutely disapproving of this former king, the prophet might be suspected of biased judgment. We must not from the brief record conclude that Ahab was not a great king. In the first place, he reigned for twenty-two years, which in those troubled times meant that he was, in general, satisfactory to the people. He rebuilt Jericho, and he married a Phoenician princess in order to establish friendly relations with that older country to the north. He carried on successful wars with Syria to the north and east (chap. 20). The consensus of opinion of those scholars who have access to all discovered records seems to be that he was a powerful and, on the whole, a wise king.

There was in Israel at this time a liberal relation between king and people. There was no noble order, no established succession. The king and people covenanted together as brethren. A king dared not violate certain rights of his subjects. The king's bride from Phoenicia naturally brought with her from the north the paraphernalia for the worship of her own god, the Phoenician Baal, and insisted on establishing near the palace a place for it. Ahab would not be likely to see any harm in this. *He* was not forsaking the God of Israel. He was simply adding prestige to his kingdom, and allowing his wife a privilege which she might have had in any country. But the glory and prestige of Jezebel's sanctuary was too attractive for some of the Hebrews, and they were led to go in large numbers to the House of Baal to offer sacrifice.

In order to understand more easily how the followers of Israel's God might make such an easy transition, we must recall that Baal was a common name applied to the old Canaanitish gods, nature dieties under whom the land had

flourished, bearing abundant crops, feeding many flocks and herds. It was this very prosperity which the Hebrews had coveted and for it had braved the dangers of their early invasions and gradual conquest. There were many active Baal sanctuaries still in the land. Hebrews as well as Canaanites possibly frequented them. We recall that Jeroboam favored many local sanctuaries and rededicated old "high places." Their presence had not been regarded as displeasing to God, who had himself in common thought taken on many of the valuable characteristics of Baal. He, too, was now a god not of the desert alone but of agriculture. He had shown himself a god of increase and prosperity for his people, as the Baals had been for the Canaanites. It was hard for them to distinguish between him and the old gods. But here was something different. Jezebel's god was a new Baal, a foreign god, brought into the country. To worship him was to acknowledge the power of an outside god in Israel. What would the Lord, through his prophet, say about this?

Just here we come upon the stories of the prophet Elijah, inserted at length, and in vivid detail, in the midst of the annals of the kingdom. These are thrilling stories and must be read with imagination and told with full use of dialogue and scenic effect. In using them, we have too often chopped them up into small bits trying to draw religious lessons from each incident. Such lessons must come from the impact of the whole series giving us the complete picture of the man Elijah, his spirit and purposes. After that the individual episodes acquire significance and can be used separately if desired.

Evidently, Jezebel had already been stirred by opposition or criticism to punish the prophets of God, and they had scattered, Elijah among them (18:13). The suddenness of

his reappearance (chap. 17) is suggestive of the vigor and immediacy of his attitude. He feels responsible only to God, whose will must be demonstrated. Something must be done. The inroads of this foreign Baal in the land were intolerable to God and to his prophets. Notice that Elijah intends to attack all Baalism, not alone Jezebel's, by establishing the fact that only the Lord commands the elements of nature. This must be the ground of any decisive contest between God and Baal. The prophets sensed the difficulties which would arise throughout the land because of this new prestige given to the worship of a Baal. It would undoubtedly lead many to return to the worship of the Canaanitish Baals whose shrines might be in close proximity to the homes of the people, and the religion of Israel's God, by the standards of which the prophets had been judging kings and people, would be cast aside.

The story of chapter 17 is a unit. It begins with Elijah's prophetic announcement of a drought, a calamity of nature that only God could remove. It was an expression of the Lord's severe displeasure with Ahab, who as the husband of Jezebel and king of Israel was held responsible for conditions in his kingdom. After this daring announcement Elijah disappeared.⁷

The drought came. Elijah continued to absent himself. Persecution of the prophets of God drove them from the country or into hiding. Three years passed, and the terrors of drought were increased by famine of both food and water. Ahab had carried on a continually fruitless search for Elijah in order that he might persuade him to remove the curse. In his extremity he was compelled to go up and

⁷ The incident of the widow's cruse inserted in the text is one of the many stories that gathered about the name of Elijah and may be omitted as breaking the continuity of a more important story.

down the land seeking any bit of water and grass so that horses and mules necessary in case of war might be saved. This picture is the prelude to another sudden appearance of Elijah. He is seen first by Obadiah of the king's household, who had preserved the lives of many prophets by bringing to them food where they were hidden in a cave. Obadiah, fearing that the prophet will again disappear, reluctantly consents to deliver to his master the news of Elijah's return. The interview that follows between king and prophet is startling. Elijah proposes that the people shall choose between the two gods, both of whom shall be tested by fire.

Now as soon as Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him,

"Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"

"I have not troubled Israel," he said, "but you and your father's house, in that you have forsaken the commands of the LORD and have gone after the Baal. Now therefore send and gather to me all Israel, to Mount Carmel, together with the four hundred and fifty prophets of the Baal and the four hundred prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

So Ahab sent to all the Israelites and gathered the prophets together to Mount Carmel. Then Elijah came near to all the people and said,

"How long are you going to limp upon two diverse opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him, but if the Baal, follow him."

But the people gave him no answer. Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left as a prophet of the LORD, but the prophets of the Baal are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bulls, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood but make no fire, and I will prepare the other bull and place it on the wood, but I will make no fire. Then call you on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the god who answers by fire, he is God."

Thereupon all the people answered and said,

"It is a fair test!" [18:17-24].

There follows a brilliant picture: the coming crowds, the ringing challenge, the spectacular building of an altar by

the Baal prophets, the priests and prophets through prayers, cries, and shouts imploring their god to burn the offering, Elijah, calm and majestic, mocking their fruitless efforts. In ecstatic frenzy the Baal prophets mutilate themselves with knives. But the sun blazes relentlessly down, and no consuming fire comes. In exhaustion they fall into despair. Then at Elijah's call comes a triumphant manifestation of the power of the God of Israel. Upon the ruins of an ancient Israelitish altar Elijah builds anew, and lays upon it the sacrifice. He protects his offering from any possibility of a charge of deception. He projects his soul in a great appeal to God for vindication of himself and his prophet. The fire descends. The sacrifice is burned. The prompt execution of all the Baal priests and prophets perfects the picture.

So Elijah said to the prophets of the Baal,

"Choose for yourselves a bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but make no fire."

Then they took the bull which he gave them and prepared it, and called on the name of the Baal from morning until noon, saying,

"O Baal, answer us."

But there was no voice and none answered. Then they performed a limping dance around the altar which they had made. But at noon Elijah mocked them, and said,

"Cry with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened!"

So they cried with a loud voice, and proceeded to slash one another according to their custom, with swords and with lances until the blood gushed out upon them; and when midday had passed they worked themselves into a prophetic frenzy until the offering of the oblation; but there was no voice, nor answer, and none regarded. Then Elijah said to all the people,

"Come near to me."

So all the people drew near to him; and he repaired the altar of the LORD which had been torn down. Accordingly Elijah took twelve stones,

corresponding to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob to whom the word of the LORD came, saying,

“Israel shall be your name.”

With the stones he made an altar in the name of the LORD. Then he made a trench around the altar of the capacity of two homers of seed. He also laid the pieces of wood in order, cut up the bull, and laid it upon the wood; and he said,

“Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt-offering and on the wood.”

“Do it a second time,” he said.

So they did it a second time.

“Do it a third time,” he said.

So they did it a third time, so that the water ran around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water.

Then when it was time to offer the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said,

“O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that thou art God in Israel and that I am thy servant, and that at thy command I have done all these things. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O LORD, art God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.”

Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt-offering and the wood, the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. So when all the people saw it, they fell upon their faces and said,

“The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.”

But Elijah said to them,

“Seize the prophets of the Baal; let not a man of them escape.”

So they seized them, and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and slew them there [18:25-40].

One has been accustomed to end the story here, but this is not the legitimate place to do that. A still more difficult test lies before the prophet. The curse of the drought had not yet been removed. He must prove that God would bring rain as well as fire. There now follows that period when Elijah in utter agony “crouched down upon the earth, with his face between his knees,” and prayed desperately for further vindication, sending his servant anxiously

back and forth toward the sea to discover if possible a cloud. Then a great moment—a tiny cloud on the horizon! Elijah, supremely confident in his God, sends his servant to command the bewildered Ahab, "Harness your steeds and go down that the rain stop you not." Ahab, too, saw the signs. Swiftly he drove toward the sheltering city of Jezreel. Gathering his garments about him, the prophet ran faster, and, behold, when Ahab entered the city *in a pouring rain*, Elijah was before him at the gates. What a climax!

Then Elijah said to Ahab,

"Go up, eat and drink; for there is the rushing sound of rain."

So Ahab went up to eat and drink, but Elijah went up to the top of Carmel, and crouched down upon the earth, with his face between his knees; and he said to his servant,

"Go up now, look toward the sea."

So he went up, and looked and said,

"There is nothing."

"Go back seven times," he said.

So the servant went back seven times. However, the seventh time he said,

"There is a cloud the size of a man's hand, rising out of the sea."

"Go up," he said, "say to Ahab, 'Harness your steeds and go down, so that the rain may not stop you.'"

Moreover, in a very short time the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great downpour. But Ahab rode on and arrived at Jezreel. The hand of the LORD also was on Elijah so that he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel [18:41-46].

Of course, this story has been colored by the accretions of time and credulity. This is a story, not an accurate record. It is full of the superstition of the time. But it is a glorious picture of a strong man of God confident of his mission to announce and to execute the judgments of the Lord upon the king who had dared to welcome a foreign god into his land. But this was not all. Elijah was the spokesman for

a group—the scattered prophets and those thousands in Israel who had never “bowed the knee to Baal.” Later events show us, as we shall see, that something happened there to change the course of history.

Jezebel's widespread persecution of the prophets continued unabated. Certainly, her attitude of antagonism was increased by the terrible story of Mount Carmel. We must not forget that the contest staged there was not alone between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, but felt to be between God himself and Baal, two gods fighting for supremacy. Elijah's slaying of the prophets of Baal was a necessary part of the victory of the one God over the other. But events proved that it was not alone a war to the death between Israel's God and Baal, the foreign god who, invited by a stranger, had come into Israel. It was a battle between Elijah and Jezebel, for she throws down the gauntlet (19:2): “His life or mine.” Small wonder that, after the excitement and strain of his triumph, Elijah suffered a physical as well as a spiritual collapse. Whether the later story should be used in connection with the one just presented will depend upon the age of the pupils. With high-school boys and girls it may well be used as a final act to the drama just preceding it. Younger pupils have not the experience which would enable them to understand the reaction which comes after a great physical and spiritual effort even when it ends in victory. As a matter of fact, Elijah, after a vengeful threat sent by Jezebel's messenger, again fled for his life to his familiar desert. There he laid down in utter exhaustion, crying out to God to let him die. Sleep came. The story tells us that he was roused by an angel such as the ancient Hebrews loved to think were messengers of God. The angel brought him food and water, and, refreshed, he lay down again. But once more the angel came, this time command-

ing him to eat again, and then to proceed on his journey, which would end at the Mount of God, for in his heart Elijah knew that he was fleeing not alone from Jezebel but to God. Arrived at Mount Horeb he lodged in a cave in the mountain for many days, and then returning strength brought aroused conscience. In the atmosphere of the wind and storms and violence of nature, even earthquake and fire, he came back to his old sense of a mission. The call of God bade him return to Israel undiscouraged, not only to continue his own work but to choose a successor who might lead the prophets to victory. He saw clearly that the dynasty must change or the prophets perish.

Now when Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword, Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying,

"As surely as you are Elijah and I am Jezebel, so may God requite me and worse, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."

Then he was afraid and arose and went for his life, and came to Beersheba that belongs to Judah; and there he left his servant. But he himself went into the desert a day's journey, and came and sat down under a broom tree, and he requested for himself that he might die, and he said,

"It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."

Then he lay down and slept under a broom tree. Suddenly an angel was touching him, and he said to him,

"Arise, eat."

And when he looked, behold there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones, and a cruse of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. But the angel of the LORD returned a second time and touched him and said,

"Arise, eat, for the journey is too great for you."

So he arose and ate and drank and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the Mount of God; and he came there to a cave and lodged there.

But the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts," he said, "for the Israelites have forsaken the covenant with thee, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left, and they are seeking to take away my life."

"Go forth," he said, "and stand upon the mount before the LORD."

Now behold, the LORD was passing by, and a great and mighty wind was rending the mountain and shattering the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire, and after the fire the sound of a gentle whisper. Now as soon as Elijah perceived it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him and said,

"What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts," he said, "because the Israelites have forsaken the covenant with thee, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they are seeking to take away my life" [19:1-14].

But the Lord said to him, in effect: "Go back, Elijah. You have work to do. Israel needs a new king. You shall anoint him and also your own successor. There are thousands in Israel who will stand by you."

No need to emphasize the religious lessons of this story of Elijah's devotion to a great cause. They are too evident, and people of today are finely sensitive to the appeal of a cause. We should read chapter 20, which pictures war with Syria in which Ahab was victorious, but it was not instigated by the prophets, and they heartily disapproved of Ahab's bargaining for peace with Syria (vs. 42).

We are now interested, however, in another story which brings Elijah again into the presence of Ahab. We should recall, before reading it, the existence of a brotherly relationship between king and people in Israel rather than that of an autocracy. Custom demanded that the king should

not interfere with the property of his subjects but must deal with them as men rather than minions. It appears that Ahab, who had greatly beautified the city of Samaria, his capital, looked with longing eyes on a piece of property adjoining the palace and its gardens. We do not need to tell the story in detail here, for it is very graphically and briefly told (21:1-29). We simply call attention to Ahab's business-like offer to Naboth to purchase his inherited property and its refusal, after which Jezebel enters the picture. Seeking to comfort her disappointed husband and also to secure the territory in question for the palace garden, she undertakes to get that land by hook or by crook. It was always possible to get condemnation among the Hebrews on the testimony of two witnesses to a crime. It is easy to picture the religious fast which the popular queen succeeded in calling by fictitious letters, and the fastening upon Naboth there, through two unscrupulous witnesses, the charge that he had cursed God, as well as the king. The penalty for blasphemy was stoning. It was immediately carried out.

One surmises that Ahab had met a condemning conscience before he saw Elijah, as he walked in the vineyard of which he was now the possessor. Again our author loves to repeat the picturesque inquiry from Ahab to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" and there follows the terrible curse upon Ahab and Jezebel. We may omit verses 25 and 26 as foreign to the story, and notice the effect of the curse upon Ahab. There is a phrase in the old King James Version which is very effective here: "And Ahab walked softly all his days." The more modern phrase, "went about quietly," is not so picturesque. This story helps us to see how the prophets were gaining in power and growing toward the social idealism and the moral standards which characterized their teaching in later times.

Another story of Ahab (22:1-40) is interesting to us sim-

ply as a picture of the prophets as a class, and their way of working. Ahab had been requested by Jehosaphat, the king of Judah to the south, to join him in retaking Ramoth-gilead, which had once belonged to Israel but had been captured by Syria. While this southern king is visiting Ahab for the purpose of urging his consent to the alliance, they call the prophets together, of which there seems now to have been a large number, to find out whether God would approve their expedition. The picture is interesting: the two kings sitting on their separate thrones in purple majesty at the city gates, surrounded by prophets in the religious ecstasies which were supposed to testify to the genuineness of their prophecies. One prophet known to Ahab has not been invited, "for" said Ahab to Jehoshaphat, "I hate him; for he never prophesies for me good, but only evil." Jehoshaphat protests, and Ahab sends for the absent prophet Micaiah, who appears. The messenger, however, warns him that it would be well for him to give the same favorable message that the others were giving, in weighing the expedition. To this warning Micaiah paid no heed, claiming that he spoke truth in the name of the Lord, and saw Israel scattered and defeated. Then he denounced the other prophets, charging that a lying spirit had been put into their mouths. The conversation throughout is very interesting.

Now the messenger who went to call Micaiah spoke to him, saying,

"See, now, the prophets with one accord have spoken good to the king; let your word, I pray you, be like the word of one of them and speak good."

"As the LORD lives," said Micaiah, "what the LORD says to me, that will I speak."

Now when he came to the king, the king said to him,

"Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear?"

"Go up and prosper," he said to him; "for the LORD will deliver it into the hand of the king!"

But the king said to him,

"How many times must I adjure you that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?"

"I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains," he said, "like sheep without a shepherd; and the LORD said, These have no master; let them return each to his home in peace.' "

Then the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat,

"Did I not say to you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but only evil?"

But Micaiah said,

"Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne and all the army of the heavens standing by him on his right hand and on his left; and the LORD said, 'Who will deceive Ahab so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' Then one said one thing and another another, until a spirit came forth and stood before the LORD and said, 'I will deceive him'; and the LORD said to him, 'By what means?' He said, 'I will go forth and become a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Thereupon he said, 'You shall deceive him and also succeed! Go forth and do so.' Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, since the LORD has spoken evil concerning you."

Then Zedekiah, the son of Chenaniah, approached and struck Micaiah upon the cheek, and said,

"Which way did the Spirit of the LORD go from me to speak with you?"

"Indeed, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself," said Micaiah.

Then the king of Israel said,

"Seize Micaiah and take him back to Amon, the governor of the city, and to Joash, the king's son, and say, 'Thus says the king: "Put this fellow in the prison and feed him with bread and water scantily until I return victorious." ' ' "

Whereupon Micaiah said,

"If you do indeed return victorious, the LORD has not spoken by me." "Hear, all you peoples!" [22:13-28].

Micaiah is returned to prison and prison fare but is content to let time show that he has given a true message. The story then goes on to describe the battle resulting in the tragic death of Ahab. To the prophets, this was doubtless

a fulfilment of the curse which had been pronounced by Elijah.

We may pass now to a somewhat fantastic story (II Kings 1:1-18) upon which we shall not enlarge, but which represents the son of Ahab, now the king of Israel, ill in Samaria. He inquires whether he will recover, not of the Lord, but of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron. This is a clear suggestion of the fact that, while the Lord was recognized as the God of Israel, many other old gods of the land were still regarded as having power. The fury of Elijah at the king for thus dishonoring his own God is great. But the king answered his rebuke by sending soldiers to take the prophet. Three expeditions succeed one another, each one numbering fifty men, and each of these groups is promptly consumed by "fire from heaven." When Elijah, instructed by God, finally answered the king's summons, it was to pronounce his doom. "So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken." Another story (2:1-18) tells us that in the sight of Elisha, whom he had commissioned to be his successor, Elijah was taken up by a whirlwind in a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire. He disappeared, casting from him his mantle which fell into the hands of Elisha, who was then pronounced by fifty prophets who had witnessed the scene from afar as the rightful successor to his master.

These fire stories seem to belong peculiarly to Elijah, and one wonders if the first story of the tradition of the miraculous fire on the sacrifice on Mount Carmel did not give rise to a great many stories about Elijah that might be called "fire stories." It is perfectly natural that any number of stories about so conspicuous a figure as Elijah would rise, and that many of them should be characterized by manifestations of fire does not seem unlikely. These stories help us to see that the element of miracle in them is only a mat-

ter of quantity. As a quality, it is always there. One should not attempt to eliminate it or explain it away but keep the stories true to the time out of which they arose. We have found it necessary frequently to disagree with early religious standards represented in our text. Certainly, we shall not require ourselves to regard as historical fact stories rising out of these times. But their higher truth for us lies in the majestic personalities which we discern through the mists of tradition, as well as the rising tide of influence of these representatives of God, with their increasing appreciation of his moral qualities, and their consequently increasing demands for a higher religious and moral life on the part of the people.

One turns to the stories of Elisha and finds a very different series. Elisha might be called the "gentleman prophet." He was a diplomat, a juggler of destinies. He was a man of magic, using it, according to the stories, both upon important and upon unimportant occasions. The background is a series of wars with Syria, but these are not important for our purpose, and the miracles stand out almost independent of them. We do not advise their use as religious material to any great extent. They are colorful, however, and perhaps one or two of them are of value. The story of a Syrian military commander in whose household there dwells a little Hebrew girl, a captive whom he had brought as a slave for his wife, is one of these (5:1-19). In her not unhappy home the girl became aware that her master was a leper. The story is confused because the reader has to travel in his mind from Syria to Palestine and back again, and a clearer picture can be secured by placing one's self in the Syrian home of the captive girl and relating the whole story from that point. Such a device makes the story picturesque and unified, and the climax is not so much in the

miraculous cure of Naaman as in the satisfaction of the maiden whose God is brought to Syria, through the two mules' burdens of Palestinian earth which Naaman, in his desire to worship so powerful a God, transports. Recall that the activities of a God were supposed to be confined to his own land. Naaman, by transporting a bit of it, felt that he was carrying God with it, and upon it he and his household might kneel and worship the God of the Hebrews. Likewise, in her isolation from the land of Israel the Hebrew maiden had not felt herself able to pray to the God of Israel, but upon this bit of Palestinian earth she was able to reach God.

The story may be rearranged somewhat as follows:

There was once a maiden of Israel who lived in a village of northern Palestine. Syria, still farther north, was at war with Palestine, and often there were raids upon villages made by bands of Syrian soldiers, roaming about the country. One day one of these bands fell upon the village where the girl lived, and with others she was carried away captive. What was to befall her she did not know, but usually captives were sold as slaves, and often they fell into bad hands. Her fears were great. She had no one to comfort her, and she even thought that in leaving her own country she was leaving her God behind, for she had been taught that God dwelt only in the country of the Hebrews.

But things did not turn out so badly for her as she had feared. The head of the Syrian armies was a nobleman, and, when he saw this little girl among the captives, he said to himself, "I think she will make a good servant for my wife." He took her home as a gift to his wife. She waited upon her mistress daily and found her very kind, and finally came to love her almost as a mother. She was taught many useful things. She became skilful at embroidery and could perform the lighter tasks of the household. Indeed, she found herself in a very happy situation. But there was a mystery about the household. She felt that her mistress was sad. She longed to know why, so that, if possible, she might comfort this woman whom she loved.

One day when the two were alone upon the housetop, the mistress told her the secret of her sadness. She said that Naaman, the kind friend

of the little girl and the father of the household, was suffering from a disease from which he would never recover. It was a secret because, if people knew of this illness, they would want him put away in a house by himself, for it was believed that this special illness was a punishment from the gods, and anyone coming near to Naaman might suffer the same punishment. *We* would say his disease was contagious. And so there was deep sadness in the heart of the mistress, and the little girl became sad also. "O," she said, "if I could only help my master!" She thought a great deal about it, and then one day she remembered that long ago in her own country she had heard of a prophet, or man of God, who had cured a man who had this same disease of leprosy. And she said to her mistress, "Would that my master were with the prophet in my country! Then might he cure him of his leprosy." And she related all that she could remember about the prophet. Her mistress spoke to her husband, saying, "The little maiden who came out of Israel says that there is a prophet in Israel who has cured the leprosy. Now, do go and find him."

Naaman knew nothing about the God of Israel or his prophets. He went to the king of Syria, and the king said, "Go and I shall send a letter to the king of Israel and you shall take it."

So he wrote a letter to the king of Israel, commending Naaman, who then prepared a great present of silver and gold, and of changes of raiment, with which he might surely buy his cure from the prophet.

Then they started, Naaman and many servants, with their camels, a real caravan, with mules to carry the great burden of gold and silver and wonderful gifts. The mistress and the little maid watched the caravan go down the road until the last bit of dust had disappeared, and there was only silence and a long, long road. Then they went back and tried not to think of the days that must pass before Naaman could return. They went about their daily tasks. They sewed and they talked, and very frequently they wondered how far Naaman had gone, whether he had seen the king yet, whether the prophet was still living in Israel, and most of all whether he could do anything for Naaman. They thought about it day and night.

Days passed, and it was almost time for Naaman to return. If all had gone well with him, he surely would be there within a day, and so they began to watch from the housetop far down the long road. They had mingled feelings, for if he should come back with everything the same, how sad they would be, for this was their last hope. But how marvelous if he should be cured. Then how happy they would be! Soon they saw

a tiny speck of dusty cloud far down the road, so small that they could not tell whether it was the wind or the dust of a caravan. Then, they looked again, and kept looking, and by and by they saw that it was a train of camels, and, as it came nearer, they could plainly see Naaman riding ahead. He sat very erect, and there was something about the way in which he rode that made them feel that he was happy. Nearer and nearer they came, until at last the mistress and the maid could no longer refrain from going out to meet the caravan. And, as Naaman came close, his camel knelt, and he leaped to the ground and came toward them. They said, "How is it with you?" and he said, "I am well." And they said, "How was it?" He said, "I'll tell you about it. I went to the king, and I gave him some of my gifts of precious things, and the letter from our king. He was very angry and said, 'Can I kill people and make them alive at my will, that your king should send you to me to cure your leprosy? He is trying to pick a quarrel with me.' And he tore his garments in anger at the thought. But just at that moment there came a messenger from the very man of God that I was trying to see, and he said to the king, 'My master says, why do you tear your garments. Tell the man to come to me that I may show him that there is a prophet in Israel.' "

So Naaman said, "I went with my horses and my chariots and I stood at the door of Elisha the prophet. Of course, I thought, 'He will come out to meet me, the captain of the hosts of Syria,' but he only sent out a messenger who said, 'Go and wash in the River Jordan seven times and your flesh shall be restored sound and clean.' I was angry and went away. I had thought that at least he would wave his hands over me to cure me. I said to myself, 'Are not our own rivers of Abana and Pharpar better than this muddy River Jordan? I can go back and wash in them and be free of my illness.' But my servant said to me, 'My master, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? Why not do this thing and wash in the River Jordan?' I went down as he said and dipped myself in the River Jordan seven times and my flesh became as clean as a little child's, and I was cured. Then I went back to the prophet and said, 'There is no God in all the world that could do this thing but in Israel. Now I pray thee, take this present from me,' and I offered him the things that I had brought as gifts. And he said, 'As God liveth before whom I stand, I will take nothing.' I urged him to take them, but he still refused. 'Well,' I said, 'if you will not take anything from me, let me take something more from you. Give me but two

mules' burden of earth from this land so that I may take it back and upon it offer sacrifices to your God who shall from henceforth be my God also.' And he gave me these two mules' burdens of earth." And Naaman pointed to the earth-laden mules beside him. "Then the prophet said to me, 'Go in peace,' and so we have come."

There was great rejoicing in the house of Naaman that night. He was a good master and he was well, and his household could see it. His wife was happy, for she saw ahead long years of peace and comfort with her husband. But the happiest one in that household was the little maiden, for she had been the means of curing her master. Had she not had the courage to do the thing that she thought of doing? And was she not now able to pray to her own God, kneeling upon earth brought from her homeland, the land where she thought God dwelt?

Comparison of the story with the text will show that the essential facts have not been changed, only the point of view. Originally the story was intended to glorify the *prophet*, and it accomplished that purpose. We have used it to present a thoughtful little girl, a story which will give to other children an emotional drive in the right direction. It is equally proper to use the story with its original intention if one is seeking to discover evidence of the accumulation of stories about the prophet.

Out of the confused stories of the wars, we get another interesting bit, following the description of the terrible scarcity of food in the city of Samaria, under siege by the Syrians (chap. 7). Four starving lepers, outcasts, were before the gates of the besieged city, afraid to enter them for fear of being cast out as lepers, and afraid also for the same reason to appeal to the besieging army as deserters from Israel. At last, however, they decided that they would die of hunger unless they did one or the other of these two things, and they decided to appeal to the Syrians. Unknown to the people of the city, for some reason the Syrians had become frightened and abandoned the field. When the

lepers arrived at the camp, they found precious treasures and plenty of food but no army. They ate until satisfied, and then carried away some of the treasure and hid it for future need. Then, with an awakened sense of responsibility, they felt that the good news should be communicated to the starving people within the walls, so they unselfishly returned to the city and told the gatekeepers what they had seen. Their story was, of course, not believed. But it was decided to send out scouts who, upon returning, said that the report of the lepers was true. Then the city was filled with wild rejoicing, and the people went out and gathered in the abandoned treasure. But, alas, we have no record of any reward to the four lepers! In this story we may have an opportunity to impress the importance of an obligation, recognized by the outcast lepers, but ignored by the people of the city.

During the lifetime of Elisha a great revolt occurred in Israel, apparently led by the prophets. It was Elisha who crowned a new king Jehu, a man altogether out of the succession and one who proved himself to be a terror. He was honored in the story because through him the curse of Elijah upon Jezebel was fulfilled, as she was thrown from the window of her palace to die. Her corpse was eaten by dogs that swarmed the street. Among Jehu's terrible acts was the slaying of all the descendants of Ahab, including also the kinsmen of the king of Judah, who were at the time on a friendly mission to the king of Israel. His objective included also all worshipers of Baal, and, under a pretense of himself joining the company, he gathered together numbers of Baal-worshipers and burned them together with all the altars and houses of Baal to be found, completely eradicating, as he thought, the worship of Baal from the land. He is highly commended by the writer for these terri-

ble deeds, but evidently his reform was not sufficiently thorough, for later prophets condemn him for retaining, at the sanctuaries of Bethel and Dan, the golden calves that still characterized worship at those sanctuaries. For this the prophets believed he was punished by defeat in war with the Syrians. Hardly usable in religious education is the story of the ruthless Jehu.⁸

We have seen Elijah as a commanding figure, fiery, zealous, intense in his feeling for God; self-forgetful, bold, reproving wrong, the social as well as religious idealist. But Elisha was a diplomat, playing with kings, surrounded by political problems, discounting all that had been done by the House of Omri and its descendants, daring to incite a revolution, bringing about the fall of a great dynasty.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

As to the material which we have examined we find increasing evidence of its religious purpose. We have long accounts of the building of the temple as compared with very short accounts of political matters except when they are instigated by the prophets. We find long stories of prophetic activities, and they seem to dominate the history.

Kings are judged not for the strength of their political work but by the question whether or not their acts were satisfying to the prophets. In fact, we find ourselves watching the rise of prophets to power commensurate with the enlarged activities of the kingdom. And theirs was a peculiar power, for the prophet desired nothing for himself but everything for his God, for whom he was a spokesman.

⁸ A revolution of a milder type but also led by prophets took place also in Judah when Athaliah, the reigning queen, was overthrown and the boy Joash proclaimed king. It is a bloody story and not attractive, but it indicates the growing power of the prophets. The story is found in II Kings, chap. 11.

What were some of the principles of these prophets, which we find illustrated? Israel is destined for God; foreign relationships invite the worship of the gods of allied nations; they are therefore bad; Israel must be self-contained. Kings reigned by the decree of God and were subject to the laws of God and to the word of the prophet. God requires steadfast worship and disapproves material symbols such as calves. He expects justice between king and people; the oppressive or idolatrous king will lose his kingdom. Mere knowledge, cleverness, even good executive ability do not satisfy God, unless accompanied by sincere worship and obedience. Religion is above the state; prophets may with impunity defy kings.

Such was the religious philosophy of the leaders of Israel at the time when these accounts were written. What, then, was the goal of life as they pictured it? Simply to satisfy God by worship and by obedience to the principles laid down by the prophets who were his representatives. The rewards were long life, posterity, and prosperity.

But today we have no prophets with authority. The state allows us to be religious in our own way and does not require us to be religious at all. The religious man may place himself under the leadership of the church, or may practice his religion outside of it, as he prefers. Has this portion of our Bible then no useful message to our generation and to youth? Again we fall back upon the great personalities whom we see in action. What was a prophet in this period and how did he work? What was the difference between the prophet approved of God and those official prophets who embellished the court?

Elijah had a great conviction of the "One God for Israel" theology, and a sense of grave responsibility as a spokesman of that one God. A man of keen religious and political vision,

he understood not alone what was going on in Israel, as in the episode of Jezebel's god and the new sanctuary, but the dangerous significance of that, in a land where Canaanitish Baals were still many and regarded with lenience. Elijah saw a relapse into paganism as certain unless something was done about it. He was temperamental like many great religious geniuses. He rose to great heights, and with superhuman energy carried out his strategic plan, using phenomena of nature as his allies. The crisis past, he sank to the depths of weariness, despair, and fear; but, restored by rest and communion with God, his clear vision returned, and he resumed his campaign. How like the experiences of modern men save in the local circumstances. Who are or have been the modern Elijahs? What men or women have stood above their fellows in our own land, have held firm and triumphed in great causes? Wherever that happens, we have an Elijah. What more interesting task for young or old than to learn to search for and recognize such great souls!

Are the principles for which the prophets stood outmoded? Certainly not their attitude toward the unjust appropriation of the vineyard, and dishonesty of political advisers over against the honesty with which Micaiah advised the king. On a large scale just such things are going on today. To distinguish between problems which belonged to those times and problems which still exist in principle is an interesting and important task.

Then as to miracles, at least we have seen that we cannot keep the flavor of the Old Testament and leave them out. They belong to the times and embellish the stories. Some are trivial and seem to our modern minds unnecessary. Others are basic to the story and reflect some remarkable occurrence which we can but dimly discern in literature of this

character. We must go back of the miracles to the men about whose names the stories gathered and get our inspiration from them. Probably the number and quality of the stories gathering about the name of a religious leader are a fair gauge of the depth of the impression which he made upon his own and succeeding generations. These are not, however, as we have seen, a fair measure of the kings.

As to method, we surely have material in these chapters for story, dramatization, or discussion. The following list illustrates the wealth of story:

Elijah and the Drought, Baal Contest, coming of rain, collapse and return of Elijah to his campaign (I Kings, chaps. 17, 18, 19)

Fire stories clustering about the name of Elijah, on Mount Carmel (chap. 18), at the cave (chap. 19), in connection with the king's messengers (II Kings, 1:1-18) and the fiery chariot (II Kings, 2:1-18)

The vineyard of Naboth and Elijah's curse (I Kings 21:1-29)

The prophet Micaiah and the false prophets (I Kings 22:1-40)

Miraculous deeds of Elisha as illustrating the way in which fancy and superstition played around the names of heroes in an unhistoric age combined with an attempt to discover the real man behind them (several chapters)

The thoughtful Hebrew maiden in Syria (II Kings 5:1-19)

The lepers and the besieged city (II Kings 6:25 and 7:3-16)

Criteria for the choice of stories might be, for adults—"Has the story value in giving increasing appreciation of the times, and consequently appreciation of the problems of ancient religious leaders?" In selecting for youth, we may ask, "Does the story tend to produce, by example or by contrast, an impulse toward good feeling or action?"

A very interesting task in connection with the stories of Elijah would be the study of Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*, coupled with a discussion of the changes which would probably be made in the selection of biblical material if it were to be re-written today. In the selection of stories for dram-

atization, the same criteria may be used except that in some cases, such as the fire stories, dramatization would be impossible. Perhaps little children might learn to appreciate the character of the Elisha stories by playing them out. The necessity for pretending would help them to appreciate the fantastic nature of the stories and would appeal to their imagination. The kind acts of Elisha and his accommodating way of dealing with people's needs would suggest an analogy to the good fairies. We need not suggest further.

CHAPTER VI

COLLECTING AND REVISING EARLY TRADITIONS: ABRAHAM, ISAAC, JACOB, JOSEPH

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

THE first six books of the Bible, Genesis to Joshua, now claim our attention. The study of these books has been intentionally postponed not only in order to give time to accustom the reader to the historical method of approaching a book but also because they can be understood more easily after one has learned to appreciate the concentration of the life of the Hebrews in Palestine and the development of national-religious feeling.

These books are called the Hexateuch, the first five being designated the Pentateuch (the "Law" held sacred in the time of Jesus, and binding upon many orthodox Jews today). Broadly speaking, Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua deal consecutively with early legends of God's relation to the world, with remote ancestors of the Hebrews and their traditional early residence in Canaan, with life in Goshen on the borders of Egypt, and with their migration as far as the borders of Canaan. The story is completed in Joshua, with a brilliantly colored account of rapid and triumphant conquest under that hero, his forces pictured as well organized and controlled by priests and religious symbols such as the Ark. The occupation of the land as thus reported was planned and systematic.

This is just such an occupation of Canaan as in a period without systematic history and literature would be likely to be reported. It was the product of years of idealization

of the past and centuries of dwelling upon a God-ordained destiny for the Hebrew people. The books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus, each with its explanatory introduction, present laws for the government of the people at different stages of their history. Their study at appropriate points will be illuminating. At the moment we shall concern ourselves with the annals of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua.

In the southern kingdom the temple from the days of its building in the tenth century B.C. created a center for religious activities. This kingdom was less torn by political conflicts and wars with encroaching neighbors, such as those already observed in the north. A literary impulse arose early. Perhaps about the ninth century a very interesting collection of stories, poems, and pseudo-history had been put into written form. It is called by students of the Bible the J story because in it the name by which God is called is the old Hebrew word "Jahweh." This document begins in the fourth verse of the second chapter of Genesis with stories of origins and runs through the early life of the ancestors of the Hebrews in Palestine and their succeeding history down to the days of the Judges. This story was more than a compilation of current survivals. It was a real document shaped by its authors with certain very definite religious ideas: the majesty of God creating man in his own likeness, animated with his own breath; the fearful disaster of sin which had separated man from God, only to be redeemed later by faithful and obedient ancestors, although very human persons. Its continuity of narrative is pronounced. It is replete with material which, although already in existence, now becomes filled with the spirit and purpose of religious leaders whose object is to instruct their people.

But this story does not stand by itself. Sometime later,

perhaps after the great revolution in the northern kingdom and after three generations of Jehu the Usurper's descendants had reigned, there came a time of quiet in northern Israel. Then another great writer inspired by, and emulating the example of, the Judean chronicler undertook a similar task for the north. Possibly this second great document began with Abraham. It centers about dominant personalities, their relation to God and his to them. It embodied many old poems such as the songs of Deborah and Miriam, and extracts from earlier records. It frequently corrects J, is much more sermonic in tone, and not so anthropomorphic. Dreams, visions, and angels rather than direct speech are the means of communication from God. The stories are well told but less imbued with the thought of divine control than the J stories.¹ This document is called E because in it God is most frequently spoken of by the name Elohim. There were in existence, also, a collection of the David and Saul stories, the Elijah stories, and certain old books already referred to as the "Wars of Jahweh" and the "Book of the Upright."

But none of these great collections, J or E or the others named, has come down to us in its original form. Our own text includes a combination of these records and traditions which later writers, animated also by a religious rather than a historical purpose, selected for use in their own creation of a third and more comprehensive work, suited to their own generation and stage of religious development. The author of the Book of Deuteronomy is probably the work of such a later group or person who, chiefly concerned with laws, rewrote all Israel's laws and edited them from a new point of view, setting them into a historical and literary frame. He is

¹ The Norwegian scholar, Mowinckel, has recently argued that E began in Genesis, chap. 2, with the creation and is intertwined in J.

called D. Again, centuries later, the whole was re-written and recolored by one whose emphasis was upon priestly matters, and who has been called P. This was at a time when kings were no more, and the hope of Israel was in the perfection of a religious community ruled by priests through ceremonial laws. This author's work is rather easily detected by the peculiarities of his very formal literary style and language as well as by his paramount interest in ritual and genealogies.² For our purpose it is only important that we recognize that we are dealing with books of a composite character, in which the religious purpose dominates all else, and each and every editor or author concerned was seeking to benefit the particular age in which he lived. The conservation of the past and its interpretation as God-guided history was a mighty task, worthy of the best efforts and thought of prophets and priests alike through all the centuries; and the liberties which each took in the handling of his material was, *in that unhistorical and unliterary age*, justified by his great and unselfish purpose. Understanding the nature of the books, we shall not be troubled by inconsistent ideas of God and his moral purposes, or by idealized accounts of events and personalities. Our business is not to reconcile or to analyze but to find, if we can, pictures of great personalities and ancient times, as well as great religious movements, which we can bring to life for the benefit of others, and in the light of which we can better understand and use the Bible.

For centuries the stories of Genesis were taken as literal history, or at least as legends based upon historical fact.

² If the reader wishes to investigate further, he will find in Henry T. Fowler's *A History of the Literature of Ancient Israel from the Earliest Times to 135 B.C.* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1922), an interesting chapter on "Narrative Writings." See also the Books for Reference, pp. 370-71.

Then came the avalanche of science, with its story of man as found in the laboratory and in the rocks. A terrific verbal and spiritual struggle took place between those who preferred to get their natural history from the Bible and those who felt that the findings of science should be preferred. As in all such conflicts of ideas, persons became the targets, and scientists were set off in a so-called irreligious class, as over against a religious class represented by the church. The last remnants of this conflict have not yet disappeared. It can only be completely dispelled by a wider knowledge of the genuine character of the biblical literature and a widespread use of the historical background of the Bible, giving life to its religious lessons. We shall seek in it for the story of human thought and of a spiritual revelation rather than for records of science.

In the first group of stories in Genesis we have what we should expect—a story of the beginning of the world and the creation of man. Similar introductions to history are found in the records of most other ancient peoples. This, however, is followed by a second story of the creation of man in the next chapter. No one today can read these two stories without noting the vast difference between them even in the world-conception of the two unknown writers. In the first story (Gen. 1:1—2:3) we see God as a majestic spirit speaking the word at which there springs into being a world, out of darkness into light, solid ground out of the waters, vegetation, the heavenly bodies, creatures of the sky and land and water, until at last man, in the likeness of God, is given dominion over all that the earth contains and is bidden to multiply his kind, to whom all else upon the earth shall minister. All this is pronounced good by this spirit God, and, the task being completed, the creator rests on the seventh day. The effect of the whole story is a glorious impression

of the spiritual quality back of creation, and a magnificent justification of the customary use of the seventh day as one of special worship of this creator God, who is throughout called Elohim. This story, a poem in form as one can hardly fail to see in the Hebrew text or a modern translation, is not localized. It impresses us with its deep religious feeling, a sense of the writer glorying in the majesty and incomprehensibility of God.

The second story (2:4—3:24) has quite a different tone. It is like folklore. It purports to be the story of the creation of the world, but it is really the story of the conduct of a man and a woman, God's first human creation, through whom it is said certain curses have come upon the earth. It pictures a serpent as a tempter to God-like wisdom. It accounts for the fact that people wear clothes, and for the suffering of women in childbirth; above all, it represents work as a curse, perhaps a reflection of nomad ideals. These stories apparently represent the Hebrew thought about the creation of the world and of man, arising at widely separated intervals. Was it possible that the first story came out of those hard days of the Exile, when God had come to be conceived as no longer confined to the temple, or even to a single country? Of that we shall speak later. The second story reads like a tale which had come down from the earliest times, accounting for some of those aspects of life which seemed to early peoples unfortunate. Perhaps we may call the first story, because of its culmination, "The Beginning of the Sabbath," and the second one, "The Beginning of Sin."

Shall we use these stories in religious education? By all means. They have no relation to science. We shall get our knowledge of the creation of the world gradually, as the scientists from generation to generation modify their con-

clusions, waiting always with open minds for the next development of human knowledge. But that is not saying that these great poetic pictures of religious thought of many centuries ago are not useful. The majesty of God is an aspect of our religious faith. What could be more majestic than this first chapter of Genesis? It poetizes science and fills us with awe, justifying spiritually the setting-apart of a day for the exercise of the human spirit, in special worship of the unseen creative power in the universe. In the more primitive second story one sees what may be called the psychology of disobedience, the temptation (not to us by a serpent) by desire in the heart of man for that which is forbidden, gradual yielding, remorse, deprivation of privilege, and loss of security—a spiritual “history of sin.”

It is rather difficult to use the story of Cain which follows in any constructive way. Our advice is to read it but to omit it in teaching children. It may possibly reflect some old prejudice against the growing interest of the Hebrews in agriculture, and their preference for the shepherd life as more pleasing to God. It may have something to do with the fact that sacrifices involving the shedding of blood were deemed most acceptable. We shall pass immediately to the story of the flood. This is of special literary interest because it so markedly contains two separate stories. The only way to use it comfortably is to disentangle these stories, and this can be done by marking the different portions, some of which seem to come from the later priestly account previously alluded to, and the others from an earlier period. This division is as follows:

J—6:1-8; 7:1-5, 7, 10, 12, 16*b*, 17*b*, 22*a*-23*a*; 8:2*b*-3*a*, 6-12, 13*b*, 20-22; 9:18-27

P—6:9-22; 7:6, 8-9, 11, 13-16*a*, 17*a*, 18-21, 23*b*-24; 8:1-2*a*, 3*b*-5, 13*a*, 14-19; 9:1-17, 28-29.³ Read them separately.

³ From O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson, *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1934), p. 34.

J

Presently when men began to grow numerous over the earth, and had daughters born to them, the sons of the gods noticed that the daughters of men were attractive; so they married those whom they liked best. Then the LORD said,

“My spirit must not remain in man forever, inasmuch as he is flesh. Accordingly, his lifetime shall be one hundred and twenty years.”

In those days, as well as afterward, there were giants on the earth, who were born to the sons of the gods whenever they had intercourse with the daughters of men; these were the heroes who were men of note in days of old.

When the LORD saw that the wickedness of man on the earth was great, and that the whole bent of his thinking was never anything but evil, the LORD regretted that he had ever made man on the earth, and he was grieved to the heart. So the LORD said,

“I will blot the men that I have created off the face of the ground, both men and animals, reptiles, and birds of the air; for I regret that I ever made them.”

Noah, however, had found favor with the LORD.

The LORD said to Noah,

“Enter the ark, with all your household; for you alone of the present age have I found righteous. Of all clean animals, you are to take seven pairs, a male with its mate; but of the animals that are not clean a pair, a male with its mate; likewise, of the birds of the air seven pairs, a male and a female—to keep their kind alive all over the earth. For in seven days’ time I am going to make it rain for forty days and nights on the earth, to blot off the face of the earth every living thing that I have made.”

Noah did just as God had commanded him.

Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives, went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood.

Then, at the end of the seven days the waters of the flood came on the earth. Then the Lord shut him in.

(The rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights.)

The waters mounted, and lifted the ark so that it rose above the earth.

Of all that was on the land, everything in whose nostrils was the breath of life died; every living thing was blotted off the face of the earth, both men and animals and reptiles and birds.

The rain from the heavens ceased, and the waters abated steadily from the earth.

At the end of forty days Noah opened the window that he had made in the ark, and released a raven, which went flying back and forth until the waters had dried off the earth. Then he released a dove, to see whether the waters had subsided from the surface of the land; but the dove could find no resting-place for the sole of her foot, so she came back to him into the ark; for there was water all over the earth. He put out his hand, and catching her, drew her into the ark with him. After waiting another seven days, he again released the dove from the ark; in the evening the dove came back to him, and there, in her beak, was a freshly picked olive leaf! So Noah knew that the waters had subsided off the earth. After waiting another seven days, he released the dove, but she never came back to him.

So Noah removed the covering of the ark and found that the surface of the ground was quite dry.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and taking some clean animals and birds of every kind, he offered them as burnt-offerings on the altar. When the LORD smelled the soothing odor, the LORD said to himself,

"I will never again curse the soil because of man, though the bent of man's mind may be evil from his very youth; nor will I ever again destroy all life, as I have just done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall never cease."

P

The following are the descendants of Noah. Noah alone among his contemporaries was a pious and exceedingly good man; Noah walked with God. Noah had three sons born to him, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Now in God's sight, the earth was corrupt; the earth was full of wrongdoing; God saw that the earth was corrupt; for every mortal on the earth had corrupted his life. So God said to Noah,

"I have resolved on the extermination of all mortals; for the earth is full of wrongdoing through them; I am going to exterminate them from the earth. Make yourself an ark of oleander wood; make the ark with cabins, and smear it with bitumen inside and out. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark is to be three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits; you are to make a roof for the ark, finishing it off on top to the width of a cubit; and the doorway of the ark you are to put in its side; you are to make it with lower, second, and third decks. I on my part am about to bring a flood upon the earth, to destroy

every mortal from under the heavens, who has the breath of life in him; everything that is on the earth shall perish. But with you I will make a covenant; you shall enter the ark, accompanied by your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. Also, of all living creatures, of all animals, you must have two of every kind enter the ark, to keep them alive with you; they are to be a male and a female. Of the various kinds of birds, the various kinds of animals, and all the various kinds of reptiles, two of every kind are to join you, that you may keep them alive. Take also some of every kind of edible food, and store it by you, to be food for yourself and them."

Noah did so; he did just as God had commanded him.

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood came on the earth.

Of the clean animals and of those that were not clean, of the birds, and of all the reptiles, a pair of each, a male and a female, joined Noah in the ark, as God had commanded Noah.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month, on that very day the fountains of the great abyss were all broken open, and the windows of the heavens were opened. That same day Noah, with Shem, Ham, and Japheth, Noah's sons, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons accompanying them, went into the ark, together with all the various kinds of wild beasts, all the various kinds of domestic animals, all the various kinds of land reptiles, and all the various kinds of birds, everything with feathers and wings; of all creatures in which there was the breath of life, a pair of each joined Noah in the ark. Those that entered were a male and a female of every kind of animal, as God had commanded him.

The flood continued for forty days upon the earth.

The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, so that the ark floated on the surface of the waters. The waters rose higher and higher on the earth, until the highest mountains everywhere under the heavens were all covered. Fifteen cubits above them the waters rose, so that the mountains were covered. Every creature that moved on the earth perished, including birds, domestic animals, wild beasts, all the land reptiles, and all mankind.

They were blotted off the earth, so that Noah alone was left, and those that were with him in the ark. The waters rose on the earth for one hundred and fifty days.

Then God remembered Noah, and all the wild and domestic animals that were with him in the ark; so God made a wind blow over the earth,

and the waters subsided. Likewise, the fountains of the abyss and the windows of the heavens were closed.

At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters subsided, so that on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark grounded on the mountains of Ararat. The waters subsided steadily until the tenth month; and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible.

By the first day of the first month of the six hundred and first year of Noah's life the waters had dried off the earth.

By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was dry.

Then God said to Noah,

"Come out of the ark, your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives accompanying you; bring out with you every animal of every sort that is with you, birds, quadrupeds, and all land reptiles, that they may breed freely on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth."

So Noah came out, his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives accompanying him. Every animal, every reptile, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth came out of the ark by their species.

God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them,

"Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall be on every wild beast of the earth and on every bird of the air; as in the case of all the reptiles on the ground and all the fish of the sea, they have been delivered into your power. Everything that moves, that is alive, is to be food for you; as I once gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. Only, you must never eat flesh with the life (that is, the blood) in it. For your own life-blood, however, I will require an account; I will hold every animal accountable for it, and I will hold men accountable for one another's lives; whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image. As for you then, be fruitful, and multiply; be prolific in the earth and multiply in it."

God then said to Noah and to his sons with him.

"As for me, I do hereby establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and all the wild beasts with you, as many of them as came out of the ark; I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be destroyed by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to ravage the earth."

Further, God said,

"This shall be the symbol of the covenant which I am making between myself and you and every living creature that is with you, to endless generations: I put my rainbow in the clouds, and it shall be a symbol of the covenant between myself and the world. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, and then I will remember my covenant, which obtains between myself and you and every living creature of every sort, and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it, and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of every sort that is on the earth."

God said to Noah,

"This shall be the symbol of the covenant which I am making between myself and all flesh that is on the earth."

Each is a perfect story in itself, and each has its own objective. This story gives us an excellent example of the expansion and retelling of stories by succeeding generations.

One may use either story of the Flood as Hebrew folklore; the story of the origin of the rainbow, or of the succession of the seasons, or as the suggestion of God's special interest in a man who did what he told him to do. The chapters still remain a combination of primitive stories rather than a historical record.⁴ The fact that we can look with keen enjoyment at a Walt Disney picture of the story of Noah and the ark and laugh heartily without any feeling of irreverence indicates that we are learning to hang our religious conceptions of the universe on something more stable than these folk stories. Yet such an attitude does not prevent us from appreciating the influence which the stories had among the Hebrews in an unscientific age, when people interpreted God physically and according to their own best conception. They helped to build up a confidence in God as the controlling power in the universe when other evidences were not observed. Note, however, that they always attributed to him the highest moral ideals which they could conceive.

⁴ Babylonian literature and archeology also reflect a great prehistoric flood.

The reader will be interested in the little story about the tower of Babel (11:1-9). This is obviously an attempt in folklore to account for the fact of many languages. It needs no explanation. As for any religious value, however, there seems to be none to us. To the compiler of this material it seemed very important, and he therefore included it in his collection.

Children love these stories. They may be presented wisely as stories which the Hebrews told to their children, stories of God and the world as they thought of them.

From this point on, the Book of Genesis is devoted to a collection of stories of persons, those ancestors of the Hebrews who, according to tradition, had lived in Palestine in very early days, and whose residence there seems to have been one of the justifications for later seizure of the land by their descendants through a gradual conquest. There are some students of these ancient times who feel that the names Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were not the names of persons but of tribes, and that these are tribal stories. The details, however, are so vivid that, no matter what one's theory may be, he cannot escape the impression of real persons whose characters developed through experience under varied contacts and the influence of religious idealism, in just the same way that personalities develop today.

Let us follow the story of Abraham (beginning with Genesis, chap. 12). It merits careful and thoughtful reading. We find Abram (later called Abraham), in obedience to an inward urge which seemed to him the very voice of God, moving out with ambition and hope from the land of Haran, where, upon the death of his father, he had become the head of his tribe. The story of the migration is simple. It involved all of Abram's kin, his followers and his slaves, flocks and herds—all his possessions. This young man who

had but lately risen from the place of a mere member of a family to that of its head interprets the crisis as an opportunity, challenging all his interest and power. He resolved to migrate to a larger place, where life for himself and his people might develop and he himself rise to such fame and fortune as might be the goal of high ambition in his day. His program, so definitely described in the biblical story, was probably far less clear in his own vision of the future. Like others of his times, however, he found satisfaction in a relationship beyond that which he held with people, a very real relationship to an ideal God, a God of his tribe.

The story contains social situations which mark Abram as a man of his times. Ambitious for riches and for power, he seizes opportunity. He meets problems in the fashion of his day. Passing from place to place trying out different locations, at last he finds a portion of the land of Palestine which promised pasturage for his abundant flocks. In a generous fashion (chap. 13), he settled down, seeking to live peaceably with his relatives, assigning a definite and favorable section to his ambitious nephew, Lot, and preparing to build up his tribal possessions. The writer reminds us, however, that Abram never lost sight of obligations to his tribal God, and wherever he pitched his tents, even temporarily, there an altar to his God was erected and sacrifices were offered. His larger social contacts were met creatively. His ambition is always honorable and becoming to one who was the head of a tribe. We find him (chap. 14) battling with local kings, whom he finally defeats, after which he is left in peace, having rescued his nephew, Lot, from enemies who had carried him away. Indeed, his standing among the very kings with whom he had fought became not that of an invader but that of a fellow-king.

As the story goes on (chap. 15), we find traditions of in-

cidents which reveal little more of the character of Abram, but they culminate in the making of a permanent covenant between God and himself.⁵ Prosperity and posterity were promised by God to be met by loyalty on the part of man—the ideal relation between a tribe and its God. Social conditions of the times, and varying interpretations of them given by religious writers of different centuries, are reflected (chaps. 16 and 17). Then we come upon the great ambition of Abraham (now bearing this new name, as a seal of his covenant with God), for a son of his wife, Sarah, a hope which had long since been abandoned (chap. 18). Behind the embroidery of the story of the visit of the angels we see this hope blossoming afresh. The story continues in 18:16–23 with a tradition of Abraham which intensifies our respect and admiration for him. Through the angelic visitors the cities of the plains are threatened with destruction on account of their wickedness. Abraham intercedes with God, hoping to change this dire purpose. His interest in the cities of the plains was no doubt influenced by the fact of Lot's residence there, but the character pictured is too expansive to be confined in interest to his own family. Abraham, large-hearted and social-minded, counts upon God to be even more so. He confidently begs for the preservation of the cities. Though disappointed in the result, his confidence in God is not shaken, for he still sees him as a just administrator, and no less friendly to himself than before.

Passing the interpolated story of Lot, and another illustrating oriental duplicity (chaps. 19 and 20), we come to the consummation of the hopes of Abraham and Sarah in the birth of Isaac (21:1–8).

⁵ The sign of this covenant, circumcision, was an African custom. It was practiced by the Egyptians. Palestine was controlled by Egypt at this time. Doubtless the rite was held of religious significance elsewhere.

Up to this time we have found no great crisis which involved conflict of the spirit. Abraham's religious life has gone smoothly. His activities have been blessed, his dreams realized, his social sympathies enlarged, while his relations with his God were those of approval, harmony, and gratitude. Bear in mind that he thought of God as the source of all his prosperity and that he would mentally compare him with other gods of other tribes, believing him to be a better God than they. Daily he offered his sacrifice, bringing those things which he felt would be acceptable, portions of his grain, fat lambs from his flocks, calves from his herds, first or finest fruits from his vineyard—always the best of his possessions. Naturally, his increasing prosperity gave him increasing cause for gratitude and deeper appreciation of this God who had helped him to establish himself in safety, and even in luxury, in this good land. Even the best gifts that he was able to offer to his God might well seem small. Little wonder if there came to his mind, through his knowledge of customs in other lands, the idea of human sacrifice as the supreme way of expressing gratitude, or of averting catastrophe. Might this thought, once entertained, recur and eventually remain continually present with him, engendering fear lest he be found lacking in appreciation of his God? Would he come to feel that God must have his best, better than anybody else's best, even Isaac, who seemed to him a son of promise, a direct gift from God? Can we imagine this idea becoming an obsession, causing in the soul of Abraham a terrific struggle between two aspects of himself, his love for his son coupled with his horror at the thought of parting from him, on the one hand, and, on the other, his desire to achieve the highest standard of perfection in the estimation of his God?

At last the struggle arrives at a great crisis (22:1-19).

In its simple perfection of story-teller's style, the story suggests the thousands of times that it was told, becoming smooth and polished as time went on. In it we feel the strength of Abraham's resolve, coupled with longing to postpone the moment, and to protect his son from the knowledge of the fate which he has resolved. But, at the moment when he stretches forth his hand to slay his son, he is unable to commit the deed. The writer tells us naively that an angel called to him, but in the terms of modern psychology we might say that the conflict between his old idea of right and his parental love ended in the triumph of the latter; that Abraham's sense of fatherhood rose to meet his sense of obligation to God and triumphed. Right became to him the opposite of what it had seemed before, placing him on a higher religious level than if he had actually committed the deed. In other words, Abraham's religion at the point where it seemed destined to wreck him proved itself to be a life-attitude rather than a ritual, an encompassing spirit, so that the act of abstaining from the sacrifice was more religious than the act of making it. The experience eventuated in harmony, in uplift, and in even greater confidence in God and in the future of his tribe. (Perhaps in later times this was a favorite story used to condemn human sacrifice, a custom of which we find traces in the Bible.)⁶ In Abraham we now see a man in whom religion was a normal, wholesome expression of his well-rounded personality. His response to people about him, his ever enlarging social experience combined with the best that he knew in his religious code, led him continually higher and into closer communion with God and larger views of life. His personality was completed in the sense of God which enveloped him. What

⁶ II Kings 16:3.

greater benefit can religion confer upon any individual to-day?

The story of Isaac is only incidental to the story of Abraham. It has no particular religious value in itself. The story of the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah (chap. 24) must be read for its intrinsic beauty. To our editor all these traditions were of immense significance, as they testified to the close relation between the Hebrew people and God.

We come now to the story of Jacob and note first the circumstances of his childhood. A child whose birth succeeded his brother's by only a few moments, he was by that fact condemned by tribal custom to the place of the younger son. That meant that his brother Esau would not only succeed his father as chief of the tribe, inheriting his possessions, but that Jacob himself would always be, should he remain with the tribe, subject to his brother. With these facts in mind, let us question how much Jacob's desire for his inheritance was due to an innate sense of fitness for it, and how much to a temperamental, gnawing desire for what he could not have, but which he had missed by so narrow a margin. Of course, the matter would be religiously interpreted by his mother as the work of God, but to him—what a bungling God! Esau was like a wild man, ugly and hairy, thinking of nothing but the pleasures of the chase. Home-loving Jacob should have been the first-born. So the mother would say. What could one expect from a tribe headed by a man like Esau? To what a future might a tribe headed by one with Jacob's characteristics aspire? With only a little imagination one can see seeds of discontent and ambition sprout until they culminated in the desire on the part of Jacob, urged by his mother, to straighten out bad matters by usurping Esau's place.

Jacob was a young man of action. To want a thing was

to seek to obtain it. The opportunity came. A secret compact was made by the astute Jacob with the hungry and carefree Esau (25:27-34). Henceforth, in his imagination, Jacob was the tribal head. He dreamed of his father dead, and his relatives, including his brother, bowing down to him as their leader and chief. A glorious opportunity opened before him. Did he long for the realization of this opportunity only as an expression of his own growing power or had he, like Abraham, some more idealistic vision in view? If we could answer this question, we would know Jacob.

Without the blessing of his father Isaac, Jacob lacked religious sanction for his ambition. His mother, in an opportune moment, points out how, by a clever trick, he may cheat Isaac, whose mystic blessing, intended for his first-born, would insure the favor of God. Jacob's ideal of God was not high. He took the risk and successfully circumvented his blind father's purpose (27:1-41).⁷ He believed he had secured the birthright and the inviolable blessing, but he found them useless, for his brother's hatred drove him from home into a strange land (27:46-28:5). Thus far the religion of Jacob was a ritual, not a life, but now a crisis had come. In the loneliness, uncertainty, and dread of the future the fugitive Jacob turns to God. In his dream he sees what the future of the tribe might be (28:10-22). He has a conviction that the promise of God to Abraham and Isaac must be fulfilled in him, if at all. A great personal religious experience was his that night. The tribal religion became personal, and Jacob "settled with God," so to speak. Henceforth the pillar which he set up there at Bethel should bear witness to the mutual responsibility of loyalty and tribute, on the one hand, and the grant of food and clothes and a peaceful return to his own land, on the

⁷ Chap. 26 is unrelated.

other. It was a bargain with a higher power, but at least it meant responsibility on both sides, which was a symptom of developing character on the part of Jacob.

Then he meets with Rachel, and romance dawns. Characteristically willing to work for what he wanted, the writer tells us "the seven years of his service seemed to him but a few days for the love that he had for Rachel." By a trick he was cheated of his prize for a season, and another bride was forced upon him, but soon, with Rachel as his bride, he obligated himself for another seven years of service in return for her. There were deep experiences, followed by many domestic difficulties and increasing family responsibilities which Jacob seems to have carried with becoming appreciation.

His days of servitude having been fulfilled, desiring his freedom and feeling his importance, he drives a bargain with Laban. His observations in stock-raising had been acute. He trickily manipulates his flocks, and his pious explanation of the results deceives Laban. But his confidence in God's approval of such conduct is not strong enough to make him leave Laban openly (30:25—31:12), and for the second time he flees, this time with great possessions but with fear in his heart. Laban, pursuing, is unexpectedly reasonable, and Jacob again goes on his way (31:32—32:1).

Fear always drove Jacob to God. Soon it was the fear of the well-deserved and vengeful wrath of Esau which descended upon him as he approached his old home. Alone, having sent forward conciliatory presents, as well as his family and his dependents, he wrestled with his fear and his future. Jacob's religious nature craved the approval of God, but he had a fashion of forcing the hand of God in securing this approval. However, his hopes of a peaceful meeting

with his brother are realized, and he settles down in the land of his birth.

The stories that follow are confused and unimportant except as they tell us of the death of Rachel, the best-beloved wife, and of the birth of Benjamin, who with Joseph, also a son of Rachel, remained to remind Jacob of his romantic love. From this point on the story centers about these two sons, especially Joseph. So far as Jacob is concerned it pictures only the sorrows which beset his old age, the loss of Joseph, the threatened loss of Benjamin, the migration to Egypt with subsequent prosperity, and finally his death in a strange land. In the cave which the foresight of Abraham had provided for himself and his descendants, the bones of Jacob found their final resting-place.⁸

Jacob's ambition and his religion went hand in hand, but religion was usually secondary and a means to a desired end. So long as Jacob could get on toward his goal by himself, he gave little thought to God; but, when he found himself in a tight place, he turned to God with gifts and promises, conditioned upon the reward of the special good of which he stood in need at the moment. Religion to him was not a life, and it was not a friendship and a communion with God, such as that of Abraham. His confidence was in his own powers, and only when fear assailed him did he turn to God. He possessed the power of doglike devotion as father and husband, but his contacts with the world of his time seemed to bring no increasing appreciation of persons or of God.

The conditions of his early home were bad; discord, deceit, envy, the father and mother working against each other. Might a nature like that of Jacob have expanded, under right influence, toward generous idealism and away

⁸ Abraham's purchase of this cave is interestingly related in chap. 23.

from craft and graft. Could he have been led to use his powers for the good of others rather than his own? His type of religion did not do for him what Abraham's did for him. His personality took a wrong set and kept it. Religion was his tool, not his controlling inspiration. It was always a process of getting.

The character of Jacob has been a problem to many religious teachers who questioned the representation as a favorite child of God of a man who, judged by our modern moral standards, was so extremely crafty. The answer is simple. Jacob's life is interpreted by a writer to whom he is part of a very distant past and who idealizes him as an important ancestor of the Hebrews. Again, prosperity in the opinion of the early Hebrews was always the gift of God to those who were righteous. Jacob was prosperous; he must therefore in some sense have been pleasing to God. So they would reason. The later writer may have had some difficulties himself in presenting Jacob but he could not omit him, for he was in the great tradition of a God-ordained ancestry, and he accepted what he could not explain. We must not fail to note, however, that prosperous Jacob was not represented as *happy*. The prophet throughout these early stories recognizes clearly that wrongdoing wrecks happiness.

We now come to Joseph. We should read the story through (chaps. 37-50), omitting the interpolated chapter 38. It is smooth and easy reading. Joseph's ability to adjust himself to new social contacts and to new ideas is everywhere evident as he passes from phase to phase of his colorful life. Setting out like his father Jacob with dreams of personal dominion and power, his bitter experience with his brothers follows. He does not, however, take refuge in morbid hatred of them, or in attempts to outwit them. His ad-

versity becomes his opportunity. New experiences enlarge his life. As our writer understood it, "God was with him," and his Egyptian master saw it.

He was a country boy. His entrance upon the teeming life of Egypt was through the gateway of slavery, but it was the opening door of opportunity. A man with "personality," his master attributed his own prosperity to the presence of Joseph in his household and the power and favor of Joseph's God. He repudiated temptation and remained true to his highest ideals. He was put into prison as the result of his fidelity, but even there he was interested in the people about him and content to leave his own fate with his God. Through his service to others came an opportunity to serve the king. Released from prison and raised to a place of greater service than before, he finally met a crucial test of character in his treatment of his suppliant brothers.

One cannot picture Joseph otherwise than embracing the opportunity to serve the brothers who had sold him into slavery. Yet such conduct is nonetheless remarkable in a time when "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was the established code. Joseph's religion was as natural as breathing. God and his goodness were ever present. His trials became blessings because in the midst of them he was always reaching out to others a hand of helpful service. His sympathies embraced the world, and he was assured in his heart that God was with him. Joseph began his life in an atmosphere of love to which he must have responded in kind. His confidence in his father gave him the basis for his confidence in his God. But he himself chose to keep religion as an enveloping life in which his own powers continually expanded.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

Perhaps the greatest result of our survey of the stories of Genesis is the conclusion that historical and scientific truth must be sought through careful historical research, and the facilities of the laboratory, and that religious truth rises out of man's relation to God and his own experience tested by universal experience.

The stories of the beginning of the world with which this chapter has dealt are entirely unrelated to the realm of science. They are stories of man's thought in an age when scientific discovery was unknown and impossible, but when man's mind was seeking to relate itself to the universe and to supernatural beings. They were later interpreted by religious leaders who, through them, sought to impress upon their people the antiquity of God's relation to man and of man's responsibility to God. Similar stories which existed among other ancient peoples were nonmoral.

The two stories of creation come from different periods and give widely different conceptions of God. The second story, by date, but the first in order, shows a marked advance upon the more primitive God pictured in the Garden of Eden story, but in the latter a correct psychology of sin is the result of experience, and was the thought, of the man who was using the story for a religious purpose. This double origin is everywhere evident—the legendary history and the religious leader who uses it.

In the stories of the Patriarchs we find expressed the desire of the writer to embellish, and to make of deeper religious interest, old stories through which he can relate the ancestors of the Hebrews to the earliest time, and to God himself; not in the material sense in which other nations held themselves related to their gods, for instance, descended

from the sun, but related in a spiritual bond of privilege and moral requirement, on the one hand, and worship and obedience, on the other. They represent the struggle of man to know about, and to account for, life and circumstance and God.

Right and wrong in these characters must be measured by the best standards of their times. Canons of moral conduct are always changing. God does not change. But man's understanding of God moves on from age to age, and what is deemed pleasing to him in one generation may be abhorred in another. Thus moral idealism must continually change.

God's great miracle is his ability to impress himself upon individuals as upon these men of early time, differentiating them from their fellows, and making of them vehicles of new truth to the people of their own and succeeding generations. In this sense one can truly say the day of miracles is not past. God is still working. We must not obstruct his use of human beings in their proclamation of new truth, but let time test its value.

Certain characteristics of God and man, even in these ancient times, may be recognized as permanent. Faithfulness, courage, loyalty, and family love were beautiful then and are no less beautiful today.

Character develops through adversity. Personality is broadened and deepened by widening contacts. Temperament must be considered in religious education, tendencies recognized, checked or encouraged as the case may be.

As to the methods of using these stories of Genesis, the world-stories should be used with full understanding of their nature and to show what the people of ancient times thought about God. To compare these ideas with our own is a stimulating process. Even young children may be led

to think about God in all the elaborateness of his physical creation so freely taught in the schools. Can they not also consider and speculate about his moral qualities? God becomes real as they think about him.

In telling the stories of the Patriarchs, it is best if possible to tell a complete story of a personality at a single sitting. After that, and in the light of it, short stories may be told. Of course, it is understood that a single complete story must omit all details except the most important. It must be constructed with special reference to cumulative value, which will appear in a significant crisis. Comment may then be brief and convincing with, if appropriate, emphasis upon the growth of personality or ideal in the crisis. To relate experience to growth is always helpful.

An examination of these stories of the Patriarchs with reference to the goals toward which they strove, a study of these goals in relation to those of other ancient peoples, is interesting and will introduce a discussion of our own goals today. How are they different, higher, or of more lasting value? How far do they extend beyond the personal into futurity?

There is rich material for dramatization here. Isaac and Rebekah have been favorite characters for presentation. Scenes from the Joseph stories are interesting, in fact an extensive drama, *Joseph and His Brethren*, was staged a few years ago and was extremely popular. In the selection of stories for dramatization one should always avoid requiring children to act deceitfully. The Jacob story is therefore not so fertile.

CHAPTER VII

COLLECTING AND REVISING TRADITIONS AND LAWS: MOSES AND HIS SUCCESSORS

THE BOOK OF EXODUS; THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

PASSING now to the second book of the Pentateuch, we find one of the most justly famous personalities in Hebrew history. We must measure him more by the far-reaching consequences of his work than by actual historical facts, for his career is prehistoric, our only source of information being collections of stories. We can, however, legitimately say that with Moses began Israel's national unity and national religion. These beginnings were small, but their influences are traceable through all the later history. Moses, of Hebrew blood, but an adopted member of the royal household of Egypt, fearing to remain there after avenging the killing of a Hebrew by slaying an Egyptian, fled into Midianite country, pastoral land over the Palestinian border, where he settled as a shepherd and married a woman of the people.

The God of Israel's ancestors is said to have appeared to him there and commissioned him to bring the Hebrews out of Egypt, where they were engaged in forced labor amounting to slavery. He promised to reveal himself to them in the mountain. Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb¹ are both named as the place of this revelation, but this is unimportant as far as the use of the story is concerned. Perhaps the God who dwelt in this mountain and is said to have there re-

¹ These mountains have not been unmistakably identified.

vealed his name "I am" to Moses was also worshiped by the Midianites.

In reading the story of Moses, we must keep in mind our purpose—to see the man. The picture of Egypt gathered from the text is scanty and vague and of uncertain date, but any pharaoh of so great a nation as Egypt in ancient times would hardly have been as easy of access or so simply handled as our story represents. For accurate pictures of Egypt we must look elsewhere.² These highly idealized accounts written centuries later present the point of view of later Hebrews of more than one generation. Their basis perhaps was an ancient collection of stories of Moses. At all events it is this early Moses whom we seek to bring alive. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews says of Moses, whom he names in a wonderful procession of the saints, "He persevered as though he saw him who was unseen." This also was a judgment of later centuries.

Just how many years Moses labored in Midian at the daily tasks of a shepherd, or just how rapidly his self-realization came, we have no means of knowing; but his later history would suggest a temperament which responded to the free life of the out of doors, in loyal partnership with his older friend Jethro. We should have expected him to be completely absorbed in his own growing interests of family and possessions. Later events suggest, however, that he must have begun early to long for freedom for his people such as that which he himself enjoyed. Hardly could the young impetuous Moses in Midian have pictured himself as the patient loyal leader of a constantly rebellious people journeying toward a well-nigh impossible goal, with faith undiminished until the day of his death. But the possibil-

² James H. Breasted's *A History of Ancient Egypt* is an excellent popular history.

ity of that leader was within him, and that was his God-ordained destiny.

The story given us in the Book of Exodus is full of imagination that colors and glorifies it. The whole is so detailed and literal, and so saturated with religious ideas of a later period, that for centuries Moses appeared to his people as a glorious instrument, like a mechanism, through which God arbitrarily worked his will with his people. Rather, he was fighting battles which every man must fight who feels stirring within himself new powers and possibilities and who, seeing an opportunity to serve his world, yet shrinks from the task. The significance of the name "I am," by which God identified himself to Moses, suggests the undefined but exalted character of his ideal of God.

After a brief summary of the conditions of the Hebrews in Egypt, our text introduces a charming infancy legend, a custom already noted in the cases of Samuel and Samson. In the lore of ancient peoples a hero must always have a picturesque entrance into the world or into the story. We have already noted the cause of Moses' flight from Egypt, where his fellow-countrymen were engaged in forced labor.

We must remind ourselves of the proximity of Palestine and Egypt, Palestine always the pathway between the land of the Nile and the valleys of the Euphrates and the Tigris in the northeast. From the earliest times there was ready access from one to the other in trade and in war. The exodus of the Hebrews was rather a strike for independence than the desire to emigrate.

Moses in his Midianite home was doubtless quite familiar with the progress of Egyptian affairs. The old king had died. It does not take great imagination to picture Moses and his capable father-in-law Jethro, near whom he dwelt, discussing the conditions of the Hebrews and weighing the

possibilities of rebellion and migration. But where was the man who could undertake to lead such an enterprise?

The summons of God to Moses is described in a picturesque account which may well be interpreted in modern terms as a spiritual crisis, a revelation to his soul of the power of God; a call to serve his fellows in a task worthy of his highest ambition. Reports of the increasing burden of his fellow-countrymen in Egypt could no longer be ignored. Even the ruse by which he was to get the people out of Egypt came to his fertile mind. (The stories of the supernatural which embellish the account are not to be wondered at in an age when God was thought of only as a supernatural man. In our examination of the story we shall omit, so far as we can, interpolations of much later origin from the hand of the priestly writer, P.) Counting upon the assistance of his brother Aaron, a ready speaker, the imagination of Moses ran far ahead in a genuine conviction of mission (3:1—4:17). Having Jethro's approval, with his family and possessions he joined the Hebrew colony in Egypt. His brother Aaron is there enlisted. An impression of their mission is soon made by the two upon their fellow-countrymen (4:18–31) but not upon Pharaoh. Their first petition to him, although asking for only a few days in which the people might worship at the mountain at which their God dwelt, was met by a prompt refusal.

"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast for me in the desert.'"

But Pharaoh said,

"Who is the LORD that I should heed his plea to let Israel go? I have no knowledge of the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go."

They said,

"The God of the Hebrews has paid us a visit; pray let us make a three days' journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, lest he strike us with pestilence or sword."

"Moses and Aaron," said the king of Egypt to them, "why would you draw the people from their work? Mind your own business."

"The people of the land are lazy as it is," said Pharaoh, "and yet you would relieve them of their burdens!" [5:1-5].

Oppressive precautions against rebellion were immediately taken by Pharaoh, and burdens increased. Inevitably, Moses and Aaron were blamed for this disaster.

Moses, temporarily discouraged, but still confident that God was working with him, again took heart, an optimism which the people scouted (5:22-6:9). Again he tried Pharaoh, and, in order to convince him of the power of the God of the Hebrews, he used the magic that his Egyptian education had taught him. Each sign was duplicated by Pharaoh's magicians, and Moses' errand failed (7:8-13). Later the Nile River turned to a bloody appearance so that the people could not drink the water, and Moses announced that it was the hand of God, but the Egyptians dug their wells outside the polluted water (7:14-24). Then a multitude of frogs, coming up from the river, so annoyed Pharaoh that he temporarily promised to let the people go. But, when the plague ceased, he reversed his decision (8:1-15). A scourge of mosquitoes gave a new opportunity. They were said to have come at the command of Aaron's rod from the dust of the ground. The magicians, unable to produce mosquitoes, said, "This is the finger of God" (8:16-19). Superstitious Pharaoh, beginning to fear and plagued by a scourge of gnats, said, "Make your sacrifices in this land." Moses refused, and Pharaoh said, "I will let you go that you may offer sacrifices to the Lord your God in the desert; only you must not go very far away." Did he laugh when he added, "Make supplication in *my* behalf" (8:28)? But again Pharaoh failed to keep his promise. Plague followed plague, always affecting only the Egyptians. At last consent was

gained for those who were warriors to go on this pressing business of offering a sacrifice to their God on behalf of their people. But with Moses it was all or nothing, and he stood firm. A plague of locusts and an eclipse of the sun bringing darkness over all the land caused Pharaoh to waver. But Moses' demand that all the livestock as well as all the people be released was too much for Pharaoh's lenience (10:24-29). Finally a pestilence, fatal to the Egyptians alone, produced such distraction in Egypt that under cover of it the Hebrews gathered together their possessions, seized from the Egyptians what they could carry, and departed (11:1-8; 12:29-39).³

Back of this graphic description stands the picture of determined, persistent, self-possessed Moses, seizing upon every phenomenon of nature disturbing to the people of Egypt in that unscientific age, and interpreting these disasters as the work of the God of the Hebrews in such a convincing way that Pharaoh in desperation let the Hebrews go, nominally to worship their God, but, as he justifiably feared, to effect their permanent escape from Egypt. Who knows how this story might once have stood? Doubtless in those legendary times plagues were added and subtracted at will, as people rehearsed the story to later generations.

But Moses was sustained by an inner vision of the possibilities of life for his people. It was so clear and definite, and he was so buoyed up by his faith in God, that no king on a throne could daunt him. Perhaps he had spent years in the persuasion of his slave-minded people before he aroused them to ambition and energy. But finally their courage and unity was sufficient, so that on the heels of a plague he could lead the great company out of Egypt and start them on the road toward the sacred mountain where as a shepherd he

³ We omit later ritualistic sections in chaps. 12-15.

had communed with God. But, as in most heroic adventures, troubles had only begun.

The first stage of the journey was short. Leaving a wild scene in Egypt, the people laden with plunder, buoyed up by hope and their new-found freedom, marched enthusiastically to the Red Sea. But the joy of the unorganized mob of men, women, and children was soon turned to despair by news of the Egyptian pursuit. Here was a crisis at which Moses might break. But new difficulties brought new faith and a new sense of power. The wind blew in the right direction, and the people went through the shallow water of the sea to the other side. Moses' undaunted faith seemed not only justified but increased. The Egyptians were drowned. The story ends with a song of exultation in the power of their God, to which stanzas were added as the years passed.

I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously.

The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea [15:1].⁴

Moses was resourceful. He continually coupled his experience of the desert with faith in the eventual success of his enterprise and the co-operation of God. But the details of his task were in danger of killing him. He stopped for a time near his old friend Jethro, who, in sympathetic conversations which passed between them, suggested ideals of needed organization. As a result the people were better served, and Moses' own overtaxed physical and spiritual energy relieved (15:22—18:27).

Arrived at Sinai, the holy mountain, Moses sought to cement the bonds between himself, God, and the people. He prepared a code, probably of extreme simplicity of form, but representing those fundamental ideals of living at peace with one another and with God which had been

⁴ American Standard Translation.

proved in his own experience and the best group experience of which he knew.

It placed first, however, complete allegiance to God. This he presented to the people as the law of God. The people said that Moses had spoken face to face with God, and certainly Moses believed himself to be directed by God (19:1—20:20). This presentation of the Lord's message to the people was the greatest occasion of the journey—a formal recognition of willing relationship and of mutual responsibility between the people and their God.

The description of the volcanic mountain rumbling and smoking and the awestruck waiting people is graphic. Probably we should imagine brief laws, such as the present opening phrase of each command, as the content of this law code. Afterward it was elaborated by the addition of explanatory phrases.

God spoke all these words, saying,

"Since I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of a state of slavery, *you must have no other gods beside me.*

"You must not carve an image for yourself in the shape of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is on the earth below, or that is in the waters under the earth; you must not pay homage to them, nor serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing children for the sins of their fathers, to the third or fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commands.

"You must not invoke the name of the LORD your God to evil intent; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who invokes his name to evil intent.

"Remember to keep the sabbath day holy. Six days you are to labor and do all your work, but on the seventh day, a sabbath to the LORD your God, you must not do any work at all, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male or female slave, nor your cattle, nor the alien in your employ residing in your community; for in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, and the sea, together with all that is in them, but rested on the seventh day; that is how the LORD came to bless the seventh day and to hallow it.

"Honor your father and mother, that you may live long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

"You must not commit murder.

"You must not commit adultery.

"You must not steal.

"You must not bring a false charge against your fellow.

"You must not covet your neighbor's home; you must not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything at all that is your neighbor's" [Exod. 20:1-17].

This great scene over, Moses withdrew to the mountain for further communion.

The story begins anew with the narrative of the doings in the camp while Moses was absent.⁵ He returned to find the people worshipping the golden calf which they had made (32:1-35). Imagine the shock to Moses, fresh from his long communion with the unseen God in the solitude of the mountain. He met the emergency with severe anger, destroying the tables of the law which he had brought, and the calf which they had set up. Many leaders in the movement were put to death. Although he apparently triumphed, he returned to the mountain in grief and dismay. There in the desolate heights he again found comfort in a new revelation of God's presence and help. He recovered his poise and equanimity and came back, as the narrative says, "with his face aglow" (34:27-35). His lost spiritual vision had returned, together with his confidence that the thing which he had set out to do could be accomplished with the help of God.

After a long insertion about an elaborate tabernacle, a complicated ritual, and priestly activity which later writers read back into the history, the story is again resumed in the

⁵ The code of chaps. 21-23 was developed later and in succeeding centuries still further augmented. We omit also the elaborate directions for the Tabernacle and the Ark, which were also additions of later times.

Book of Numbers. Clearly the thought of Moses had been long upon the land of Canaan as the goal of their journey. In imagination he had dwelt upon it as a future home of peace, plenty, and freedom under the direction of God. How many times must he have talked it over with Jethro and with the leaders whom he had appointed.

The tribulations of the next lap of the journey, the account of which now begins, are many. Under a chosen guide who knew the country, they advanced (Num. 10:29), carrying the Ark said by tradition to contain the stone tablets with the commands upon them, which were a sign of their covenant with God. The following ritual marked the ceremony of carrying the Ark.

Whenever the ark would start, Moses would say,

“Arise, O LORD, that thy foes may be scattered,
That those who hate thee may flee before thee.”

And whenever it would halt, he would say,

“Halt, O LORD, and bless the clans of Israel” [10:35 and 36].

Troubles were many. Moses showed the strain of his terrible responsibility by fits of discouragement and depression. Again and again, however, he rose above his difficulties and, in Scriptural phrase, was “exonerated” by God.

What an unhappy crowd it was at times! Only desert food and endless hardships. Why not return to Egypt with its meat and vegetables? The naïve story of the quails embodies Moses’ answer.

Now the rabble among them had a craving for flesh, and the Israelites also wept, and said,

“O that we had flesh to eat! We remember the fish that we used to eat for nothing in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now we are hungry, and there is not a thing, except that we have the manna to look at.”

Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color was like that of

resinous gum. The people used to go about and gather it, then grind it between millstones or pound it in a mortar, boil it in a pot, and make cakes of it; its taste was like that of a cake baked with oil. Whenever the dew fell on the camp at night, the manna used to fall with it.

Moses heard the people weeping, family by family, each at the doorway of his tent; the anger of the LORD blazed exceedingly, and Moses was displeased.

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The Lord said to Moses,

“Say to the people, ‘Sanctify yourselves in readiness for tomorrow, that you may eat flesh; for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, “O that we had flesh to eat! For we were prosperous in Egypt.” So the LORD will give you flesh to eat; you shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out of your very nostrils and becomes loathsome to you—because you have spurned the LORD who is in your midst, and have wept before him, saying, “Why did we ever leave Egypt?”’ ”

But Moses said,

“The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand men on foot, and yet thou sayest, ‘I will give them flesh to eat for a whole month.’ Can enough flocks and herds be slaughtered for them to be sufficient for them? Or if all the fish of the sea are caught for them, will it be sufficient for them?”

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There went forth a wind from the LORD, and bringing quails across from the sea, it dropped them near the camp, about a day’s journey on each side all around the camp, and about two cubits thick upon the surface of the ground. All that day and night, and all the next day, the people spent in gathering the quails, the one who got the least gathering ten homers; then they spread them out all around the camp. While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was exhausted, the anger of the LORD blazed against the people, and the LORD smote them with a very great plague [chap. 11, selections].

But at last many felt that it was time to enter the land that they had long been skirting. Under Joshua’s leadership spies were sent forward to learn what they could (chaps. 13 and 14). On their return they reported a land of wonderful natural products but inhabited by men of

great stature and fierce appearance. In fear the people refused to go forward and, by a new decree from God, were condemned to resume their wanderings. Upon hearing this they repented and determined to attack the border peoples. Moses demurred, probably fearing another panic, for their courage was weak. Contrary to his advice, however, they did attack and were badly beaten and chased away. The great company fell back into the desert and resumed their wanderings, which lasted for many years, until the older generation had well-nigh passed, and a new and younger multitude were ready for the great adventure of conquest.

Throughout this period of wandering Moses, stern, careful for the safety of the people, self-forgotten, but never losing sight of his goal, held his own.⁶ There was scarcity of both food and water; stinging serpents molested them. In a fatal moment Moses lost his temper and gave himself the credit of bringing water from the rock for the people crying out in their thirst. This act was later interpreted as the cause of his being forbidden to enter the promised land with his people. At the borders of Edom they offered payment for the privilege of watering their stock at its wells but were met by repelling warriors. Miriam and Aaron died in their old age. There was sometimes deep rebellion among the people, and border skirmishes in attempts to forcibly persuade obstructing dwellers in the surrounding countries. Finally they fought and captured a part of the land of the Amorites⁷ and settled there. It was only a step toward their goal, however, and soon they spread into Moab. The

⁶ Chaps. 15-20 are later.

⁷ One of the earliest Semitic groups emigrating from the Arabian peninsula.

Balaam stories are a picturesque insertion here.⁸ They represent both folk tale and ancient poetry in which the speech of a foreign prophet is forced, against his own will, to commend Israel, when the king of Moab summons him to pronounce a curse upon her.

There must have been countless other tales of these journeyings which were lost or intentionally omitted. Only later and highly legalistic chapters remain to close the book. We find the end of the story of Moses in the opening chapters of the Book of Deuteronomy (1-3). The same book summarizes the whole story in its first eleven chapters, and ends with the death of Moses (31:14-29; 32:45-52; 34:1-12). Intervening chapters of Deuteronomy give a series of addresses or orations purporting to be delivered just before the people entered the land. These are obviously of late origin, not earlier than the seventh century, and will be discussed at a later period. The summary cited above represents Moses, during the last days of his life, in full possession of the situation, and with undaunted spirit; but, grown old and unfit for the struggle ahead, he withdraws from the scene and retires into the mountain to die. Later events indicate that competent leadership had already been chosen.

Perhaps again we may recall as a summary of the story the words used of Moses by the New Testament writer already quoted, "He persevered as though he saw him who is unseen." There is nothing that more vividly interprets the spirit of many of the finest representatives of the ancient Hebrews than just this power to idealize the future. Century by century they struggled nearer to an ideal that was ever moving on, until, in the interpretation of Jesus, it leaped so far ahead as to be the goal of all the centuries until now.

⁸ Chaps. 22-24.

People as a whole continue to vacillate and turn away from new truth, longing for the "fleshpots," but always there is a nucleus of advancing thought and life, and so the world moves on, and the cry continually goes up today as then, "Give us leaders."

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

The traditions of the Hebrews centered so strongly about the figure of Moses as the first lawgiver that succeeding generations attached his name to the first five books of the Bible not because they thought he had promulgated all that vast body of law—for they themselves wrote and re-wrote it, adding to and revising it as conditions demanded—but because his name was identified with law in the development of Hebrew life. The work of later lawmakers involved a developing body of laws plus interpretations of them. We are able to separate some of the codes as one appearing in Exodus, chapters 20–23, another in Exod. 34:17–26, and in the Book of Deuteronomy, beginning with chapter 12. The first two of these may in some of their items date back to Mosaic times; the third came into circulation in the reign of Josiah (621 B.C.) and probably originated not much earlier.⁹ The work of P, more extensive than either of the others, arose out of the deeply religious, chastened spirit of the Exile and the return to Palestine. It is replete with religious laws and ceremonial legislation. It runs all through Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, and at many points can be completely separated.

⁹ The Code of Hammurabi dates from the third millennium B.C. and represents Mesopotamian ideals. While there are similarities between it and the Hebrew code, it is not likely that the latter borrowed from the earlier but rather that it represents a general consensus of law as it existed among civilized peoples of that period.

Only in a very late age was all this body of law pronounced sacred. To attribute all of it to Moses, and to call the first five books of the Bible the "Books of Moses," is simply the Hebrew's characteristic way of honoring the whole idea of law. In the same manner they attributed most of the proverbs to Solomon and most of the Psalms to David, Solomon being the initiator of proverbial collections, and David the initiator of a collection of ritualistic poetry. We shall picture Moses not as a patient writer of endlessly detailed laws, for which the people whom he was leading had no immediate use, but as a great religious personality, ably meeting the needs of occasions as they arose.

It was Moses who brought an enslaved people to the realization of themselves. It was he who persuaded them to accept, and to expect, the leadership of their God with whom they had covenanted (Exod. 19:5-8). This covenant was binding upon both parties, but it was a voluntary covenant which could be broken by either party. The worship of God alone and complete obedience to his law were the conditions, on one hand, and a great future for the nation, on the other. In what ritual and religious practices the covenant relation found expression we cannot tell. Perhaps a brief form of the Ten Commandments, a small priesthood for the service of sacrifice, the Passover, the Sabbath. In one way or another fundamental moral law, coupled with the ideal of one God for the Hebrew people, and obedience to him in a covenant relation, was impressed. The Ark became the symbol of his presence.

Certainly, the survey of a character such as that of Moses should be inspiring to the youth of today if it is not so lost in small detail that there is no emotional impact. A rambling week-after-week series, tracing the journey of the

Hebrews through the wilderness, seems religiously futile. If one wishes all the exigencies of the wilderness brought into the realization of a group, then let it be done in a sort of symposium fashion, in a single period of perhaps a couple of hours or less, with contributions from different members of the group, of course with the consciousness that these are but stories that cannot be authenticated, but which later helped the Hebrews to visualize the genius and versatility of their great leader and his adequacy for every emergency. It is the moral character of Moses that gives religious value to the stories, which are our only avenue to appreciation of him.

To separate this material into little bits defeats our own purposes in religious education, for we at once begin to apply our own standards to these ancient events. We have to strain for our emotional effects and sometimes to apologize for our hero, and even for God himself, forgetting that a character must always be studied in the light of the standards of his time. In so far as he is ahead of them at any time, in that he is great. Moses' vision of God and his requirements was so far beyond that prevalent among his contemporary Hebrews as to be revolutionary and, in some respects, everlasting.

Shall we ask children to memorize the Ten Commandments? Yes and no. The First and Second Commandments in relation to idolatry seem to be unnecessary as a part of the moral equipment of youngsters. Certain reasons for obedience to commands form a part of several of them as they now stand. These belong to the times and can be omitted. Since in all probability each of the original commands consisted of one phrase, we can quite logically memorize these single phrases, all of which are absolutely

fundamental in modern morality and, indeed, form the backbone of civil law today. They serve as a stimulus to moral conduct and an element in religious living.

By thus dismembering, so to speak, the Ten Commandments, we do not throw away the parts which seem irrelevant, for as soon as the children are old enough to grasp a historical situation, that is, nine years and upward, they will be interested in observing the appropriateness for their own times of reasons which the biblical writers attached to these laws. To attach to each of the Commandments a reason for obeying it *appropriate for today* will then be a constructive task. Thus the Commandments may be given fresh vitality.

CHAPTER VIII

A PROPHET SPEAKS AND WRITES

THE BOOK OF AMOS

AS WE enter the field of written prophecy—that is, those books in which we have the actual speeches of the prophet as the substance of the book—we must use data which may be gathered from the books of Kings as our background, notwithstanding their vivid reflection of the prophetic disapproval of the political ideals of the time. Another source of information is now at our command, however—namely, the monuments upon which the leaders of the great nations engaged in war inscribed their own victories. These give us a means of checking upon the history contained in the Bible, but they are equally one-sided, for no oriental monarch recorded his defeats for posterity to read, and the Hebrews were too unimportant in war and battles, which were the chief subjects for inscriptions, to figure on the monumental records. One of these monuments, the Shalmaneser obelisk, is thought to picture the servants of Jehu, the king of northern Israel, among others, bearing gifts to the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III.¹

We have already discussed the bloody revolution of Jehu instigated by the prophets but failing to satisfy them. We gather from chapters 13 and 14 that both Israel and Judah later engaged in war with Syria and that eventually the Syrians were turned back (II Kings 13:22–23). We also find a war between northern Israel and Judah (14:8–14) in which Jerusalem is damaged and treasure carried to the

¹ George A. Barton, *Archaeology of the Bible* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1933), pp. 418–19.

northern capital, Sumaria. We now come to the reign of a new and important king of northern Israel, the great-grandson of Jehu, Jeroboam II, who reigned through a long period of forty-one years in the eighth century B.C. The prophet-writer tells us that successful wars enabled him to restore to Israel large blocks of territory, but he ruthlessly condemns Jeroboam II's reign, to which he gives only seven verses (II Kings 14:23-29). We see at once that the author is not concerned with history as such but is judging the kings whose reigns he is recounting purely from the point of view of his own religious ideas. Not political but religious failures are these kings, whose biographers were the prophets.

Just here it is necessary for us to make a geographical study. It is impossible for us to understand either the political or the religious situation in Israel at this time without continually reminding ourselves of the location of Palestine and its relation to the world-powers of its day. Palestine was but a small strip of land facing the Mediterranean Sea on the west and on the east great tracts of desert land, unfertilized and unproductive, until one reaches the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Along those rivers had developed, in very ancient times, cities, warlike, rich, and representing a high state of civilization. Directly to the north of Palestine was the land of Syria, whose geographical boundaries varied according to the encroachments of their northern neighbors and their own ability to rob Israel on their south. Syria, like Palestine, was a narrow strip, bordering the sea, on the one hand, and the desert, on the other. To the southwest of Palestine lay the land of Egypt, watered by the Nile, and having a history of civilization dating back for thousands of years. The dream of great nations in those days was world-empire, for the lack of it

meant possible annihilation. The centuries of conflict between the people of the Nile Valley and the peoples of the Tigris and Euphrates valleys can be found in many volumes of history and through monuments and other fruits of excavations revealed by archeology. The thing which interests us is the fact that the struggle for dominance of either one of these ancient nations meant the necessity for fighting across Palestinian soil. The only way of avoiding terrific marches and camel-train journeys across the desert was to take the well-traveled routes along the river valleys and down the coast roads through Syria and Palestine. The Hebrews, therefore, were engaged not, as one might infer from much of the biblical text, in small local wars but were in fact fighting off the dominance of these greater nations. They were striving for a few centuries unsuccessfully, of course, for a dreamed-of independence, but such a tiny nation could only remain, willingly or unwillingly, the common pathway of these great world-interests. Politically, Palestine was a fragment. It is the religious history of this little land which has made it conspicuous in the world's history, and strangely enough even today it remains a factor in efforts to maintain peace in the eastern end of the Mediterranean. We may not lose sight for a moment of this geographical background of the biblical books.

Returning now to our history, we recall that Israel had been attempting to beat back encroaching Syria on the north, and had been temporarily successful. We have already noted that the monuments record Jehu's paying forced tribute to Assyria under Shalmaneser II. As a matter of fact, as early as in the reign of Ahab a coalition of the smaller states of western Asia had presented itself against the encroachments of Assyria, and Ahab of Israel was one of the parties in this coalition. After an indecisive result,

Assyria had remained in the background for several years. Meanwhile the coalition had fallen to pieces. Assyria returned and crippled Damascus, Syria's chief city, so seriously that Israel had been able to extend her own territory in that direction. So back and forth the armies came and went. Israel must have known that it was not Damascus alone that was the goal of Assyria's ambition but rather the whole pathway from Assyria to Egypt, including all of Palestine. But they could not picture Egypt falling to her more modern enemy. The Hebrews held a buffer state, and they overestimated their ability to remain independent. When Jeroboam II came into power in northern Israel, Judah and the north were standing together, Judah confessing to a certain overlordship of Israel. Syria was fully engaged with, and crippled by, the encroachments of Assyria, and Israel's territory is said to have extended farther into the north than at any preceding time since David.

The development of commerce had been phenomenal, for the roads required for war were commercial paths as well, and caravans of rich supplies passed through Palestine, leaving their toll of wealth. The rise of a class of rich merchants in the cities was rapid.² The situation of Palestine

² Excavations show cities small, surrounded by a wall, a gateway the only means of access to outside country and, in fact, sun and air. Streets were narrow and congested, few families living alone in a house. Commerce was carried on in the streets, of which dogs and other animals were the scavengers. Buildings of yellow limestone had latticed windows without glass. Dress, except for the very wealthy, was simple; food consisted chiefly of cereals, fruits, and goat's milk, with meat only occasionally, as at festival seasons. Trade with foreigners was carried on through caravans from distant lands. A center of village life was the well. Outside the village were cultivated lands, watchtowers, perhaps accommodations for domestic animals. Slaves in larger families were permanent or for a limited period. See, for a description of city and country life, O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson, *A History of Israel*, Vol. I: *From the Exodus to A.D. 135* (Oxford: Clarendon

was critical, and the prophets of this period interpreted it religiously, for to them Israel was "God's country" and the nationalistic dream his will.

We shall examine first the speeches of Amos. He lives, he tells us, in Tekoa, which was about fifteen miles from Jerusalem. Through the pen of George Adam Smith we are able to see vividly the scenes among which he lived.

When you climb . . . the hill of Tekoa and, looking east, see those fifteen miles of chaos, sinking to a stretch of the Dead Sea, you begin to understand the influence of the desert on Jewish imagination and literature. It gave the ancient natives of Judea, as it gives the visitor today, the sense of living next door to doom; the sense of how narrow is the border between life and death; the awe of the power of God, who can make contiguous regions so opposite in character. "He turneth rivers into a wilderness and water springs into a thirsty ground." The desert is always in face of the prophets, and its howling of beasts and its dry sand blow mournfully across their pages the foreboding of doom. . . . Amos lived to the south of Jerusalem at Tekoa. No one can read his book without feeling that he haunted heights, and lived in the face of wide horizons. But from Tekoa you see the exact scenery of his visions. The slopes upon which Amos herded his cattle show the mass of desert hills with their tops *below* the spectator, and therefore displaying every meteoric effect in a way they could not have done had he been obliged to look *up* to them. The cold wind that blows off them after sunset; through a gap the Dead Sea, with its heavy mists; beyond the gulf the range of Moab, cold and gray, till the sun leaps from behind his barrier, and the world of hilltops below Tekoa is flooded with light—that was the landscape of Amos.³

The messages of this prophet are contained in a book of his own name. A modern translation of the Old Testament shows us visually that this book is written in poetic form, but

Press, 1932), chap. xv, containing local color of great value as background for personalities. An understanding of the general historical and social situation rather than exact minor data is needed by reader or teacher for the appreciation of the speeches of the prophets.

³ *An Historical Geography of Palestine* (New York: Long & Smith, 1932).

even in the older versions we feel, although we cannot see, that it is poetry. The religious exaltation of the greater prophets habitually expressed itself in poetry.

We know little of the exact procedure of Amos. We cannot tell whether he wrote his messages before giving them or afterward as he recalled vividly the circumstances which had provoked them. He may have attempted to secure permanency for them, and a larger audience, by writing them after the prophetic fever had passed. Were they not the oracles of God? or, they may have been recalled and written by some disciple of the prophet.

But we have some details in the book itself regarding the man who spoke its message. His work was not attested by miracles, as that of the prophets Elijah and Elisha and their predecessors. We have no indication of ecstatic divination but rather a calm, deliberate announcement, confirmed by observation of the laws of God as Amos had seen them operate in nature and in human life. He reasoned from observation of the past and the present into forecasts of the immediate future.

Amos does not discredit the prophets as a whole, although he was not a member of the professional prophet group. He tells us that he was a dresser of sycamore trees and a shepherd. We can safely infer that he marketed his sycamore figs, wool, and sheep in the cities. He was not an ignorant man. We must not argue from his apparent humble calling that, had he followed in the ways of his times, he might not have been rich. One feels that he was what he was from choice. He was certainly more acute in his observation than those unthinking rich in Samaria and Jerusalem whose lives he condemned. They were blind to the political signs of the times, which he clearly saw. His speeches show mastery in the expression of ideas, a keen perception of nature, and an understanding of human life.

He understood not only the political situation of his own country but that of other nations as well. He knew their past history and their present social and religious ideals. More than all he knew how to combine knowledge of the past, and observation of the present, with reason and to bring to bear upon it his powerful and vivid conception of God. He found much food for thought on his visits to Jerusalem, Samaria, and the smaller cities to which he may also have journeyed, in the marketing of his products.

In his life in the open Amos had developed ideas of God quite unusual in his time. To him God was the ruler of earth and sky, dwelling in the heavens. Not only did he appear in the physical activities of the universe and the processes of nature, as a god of law, not chance, but he kept the nations in leash. True, other nations had their gods, but these seemed to him of no account compared with Israel's God, who in any conflict of nations could handle these gods as he pleased. The God of Israel was above all else a moral being, just and demanding in others justice, righteousness, honesty, and regard for law. He was an impartial judge of human conduct, and the fact that the Israelites were his chosen people would not prevent him from exercising his power and will to punish if they transgressed his moral law. In fact, the laws governing the moral realm were as inevitable as those in the realm of nature. He was not content with ritual, no matter how elaborate and expensive it might be.

Amos shared these attitudes of his God, but not so the people of Israel. *They* thought that God was theirs alone. He could not do without their worship, for how could a God exist without people to worship him. Was not the widespread prosperity of this long and peaceful reign of Jeroboam II a sign of God's approval? God had the power to punish other nations and had done so by driving back

the enemies of Israel. But he could have no will to disapprove of her so long as she enthusiastically worshiped only him.

So, amid all the prosperity and attention to securing the material goods of life, there was time and inclination to beautify sanctuaries, hold great religious festivals, and bring magnificent offerings to be presented with elaborate ritual feasts and ceremonies to flatter Israel's God.

True, the people's conduct in homes, business, and the affairs of life was uncontrolled. They were rich and extravagant. They had power and used it to oppress the poor. Their courts were unjust, such moral codes as they possessed being constantly disregarded. Religion and conduct were unrelated. The rich and powerful were jubilantly happy and content and confident in the future. What matter if the poor were oppressed and unhappy.

One thing they really feared, and that was a catastrophe of nature. It is not without significance that in the first section of the Book of Amos we are told that he prophesied "two years before the earthquake." Earthquakes were not uncommon, but were memorable. Better keep on the right side of God, who sent them, by multiplication of offerings, praises, festivals, and the like.

It was into a historical and social situation like this that Amos the thoughtful countryman was plunged. In his imagination he saw it all continually, but more vividly in frequent visits to the two near-by capitals, Jerusalem, about twelve miles away, and Samaria, between thirty and forty miles farther north. Some indication of his hesitancy to attempt to affect the situation seems indicated by

"I am no prophet, nor am I a member of a prophetic order;
But I am a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores.
And the LORD took me from behind the flock,
And the LORD said to me,
'Go, prophesy to my people, Israel' " [7:14, 15].

He claims that in visions he saw God relenting from the harshness of his judgments but finally standing with a plumb line in his hand. This time his judgment upon Israel will be accurate and retribution certain: "God will rise against the house of Jeroboam with a sword." We do not know how often Amos spoke to the people in these cities. We must read the entire book and feel the atmosphere of his words, whether spoken or written.

In his first address in the order of the book after a startling prologue his theory that all other nations as well as Israel are subject to the Lord is marvelously pictured.

Thus says the LORD:

"For the three transgressions of Damascus,
And for the four, I will not turn it back;
Because they have threshed Gilead
With threshing-tools of iron.
So I will send a fire upon the house of Hazael,
And it shall devour the palaces of Benhadad;
And I will break the bar of Damascus,
And cut off the inhabitants from the valley of Aven,
And the holder of the scepter from Beth-edon;
And the people of Syria shall go captive to Kir."
Says the LORD.

Thus says the LORD:

"For the three transgressions of Gaza,
And for the four, I will not turn it back;
Because they carried into exile a whole people,
To hand them over to Edom.
So I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza,
And it shall devour her palaces;
And I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod,
And the holder of the scepter from Askelon,
And I will turn my hand against Ekron,
And the remnant of the Philistines shall perish."
Says the Lord God.

Thus says the LORD:

“For the three transgressions of Tyre,
And for the four, I will not turn it back;
Because they handed over a whole people as captives to Edom,
And did not remember the covenant of brotherhood.
So I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre,
And it shall devour her palaces.”

Thus says the LORD:

“For the three transgressions of Edom,
And for the four, I will not turn it back;
Because he pursued his brother with the sword,
And stifled his pity,
And kept his anger perpetually,
And cherished his wrath forever.
So I will send a fire upon Teman,
And it shall devour the palaces of Bozrah.”

Thus says the LORD:

“For the three transgressions of the Ammonites,
And for the four, I will not turn it back;
Because they ripped up the pregnant women of Gilead,
That they might enlarge their boundary.
So I will kindle a fire upon the wall of Rabbah,
And it shall devour her palaces;
With shouting on the day of battle,
With a storm on the day of tempest;
And their king shall go into exile,
He and his princes together.”

Says the LORD.

Thus says the LORD:

“For the three transgressions of Moab,
And for the four, I will not turn it back;
Because he burned the bones
Of the king of Edom to lime.
So I will send a fire against Moab,
And it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth;
And Moab shall die with uproar,
With shouting and the sound of the trumpet;

And I will cut off the chieftain from the midst of her,
And slay all her princes with him."

Says the LORD.

Thus says the LORD:

"For the three transgressions of Israel,
And for the four, I will not turn it back;
Because they have sold the innocent for silver,
And the needy in exchange for a pair of sandals;
They who trample upon the heads of the poor,
And thrust aside the humble from the way.
A man and his father go in to the harlots,
Thereby profaning my holy name.
Garments taken in pledge they spread out
Beside every altar;
And the wine of those who have been fined they drink
In the houses of their gods" [1:3—2:16].

Amos is here represented as circling Israel with his denunciations of surrounding nations, but his charges are not based upon ordinary grounds for adverse judgment.⁴ He claims that every one of these nations has violated the simple laws of humanity by cruelty in war, deportation of peoples, desecration of the bones of kings, and rejection of moral law. Then he turns upon Israel. She in her turn has trampled upon the poor and made a mockery of religion. The prophet argues that just because of the special privileges that Israel has enjoyed, such as the help of God in the conquest of the land, and the religious leaders whom he had given them, they are the more deserving of punishment. He then announces that devastating war will surely come.

By a series of rhetorical questions (3:1-8) the prophet argues that the signs of the times are as clear as those common natural phenomena which all men know enough to interpret. It is as if he said, "It is as clear as daylight that

⁴ The section on Judah is omitted as later. It may also be that other sections were added by later writers in the spirit of Amos.

disaster is coming." He bitterly denounces Samaria with her wealth and luxurious living (3:9—4:3). He invites further "transgressions," as he calls in bitter irony their sacrifices and offerings. He recalls to Israel innumerable disasters, famine, and pestilence, and warns that these were sent from God (4:4—11). He sings a dirge as if Israel were already dead (5:1—17), picturing frantic appeals at the sanctuary for deliverance from disasters which are to come. At the same time he interprets all these visitations as due to the anger of the Lord because of Israel's sins of oppression. But he prescribes a remedy in which we see the ultimate purpose of his efforts.

Hate evil, and love good
And establish justice at the gate;
Perhaps, the LORD, the God of hosts,
Will be gracious to a remnant of Joseph [5:15].

After further woes and further scorn of useless offerings the prophet especially scores the rich and the luxurious and seems almost to delight in the destruction which he predicts.

"Woe to them who are at ease in Zion,
And self-confident on the mount of Samaria;
Distinguished as the chief of the nations,
To whom the house of Israel resorts.
Pass over to Calneh and see;
And go thence to Hamath, the great;
And go down to Gath of the Philistines!
Are they any better than these kingdoms?
Or is their territory greater than yours,
O, you who put off the evil day,
And bring near the seat of violence?

"They who lie upon ivory couches,
And stretch themselves out upon divans;
And eat lambs from the flock,
And calves from the midst of the stall;

They who sing to the accompaniment of the lyre,
 And compose songs for themselves like David;
 They who drink chalices of wine,
 And anoint themselves with the finest oils;
 But they are not heart-sick over the ruin of Joseph.
 Therefore they shall be the first of the exiles to go into exile,
 And the shout of the revelers shall pass away,"
 Is the oracle of the LORD, the God of hosts.

The Lord GOD has sworn by himself:
 "I abhor the pride of Jacob,
 And his palaces I hate;
 So I will deliver up the city and everything in it" [6:1-8].

.....
 "For lo, I am raising up against you, O house of Israel,"
 Is the oracle of the LORD, God of hosts, "a nation;
 And they shall crush you from the entrance of Hamath
 Unto the brook of the Arabah" [6:14].

"A nation is to be raised up" seems to imply that Amos refers to Assyria, although, as yet in the midst of their prosperity, there seemed small cause for fear of trouble from that quarter.

We have but one picture of Amos' visits to northern Israel, although he doubtless made many. This one, however, gives us a basis for our imagination. The scene is in Bethel, a brilliant sanctuary at which the royal religious festivals of King Jeroboam were celebrated. The feasts are in progress; the crowds are there. On this occasion Amos was caught with words of destruction upon his lips. The high priest at Bethel could stand no more. He reports to the king:

"Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is unable to endure all his words. For thus says Amos:

'By the sword shall Jeroboam die,
 And Israel shall surely be carried into exile away from its soil' "
 [7:10b, 11].

He warns Amos to go back to his own land and to make his speeches there (for Amos was from the south, and Bethel was a northern sanctuary), accusing him of being on professional business, seeking pay for revealing the will of God. Amos retorts by asserting his God-given privilege of warning his people, but to no avail. He is sent away but with words of even harsher judgment still upon his lips (7:10-17).

Accounts of other visions follow (chaps. 8 and 9), whether earlier or later than his arrest we do not know. But there is no retraction. God's control of the nations of the earth is ground for the inference that he can, if he chooses, use them in the destruction of Israel. Theirs is a false security. Israel's sins of injustice, oppression, wanton luxury, and conceit that they are above the moral law will bring their destruction.

The last section (9:9-15) is thought to be of later origin, perhaps from some reader of Amos, catching his prophetic spirit but seeking to take the terrible finality out of his denunciations.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

What shall we do with this book besides enjoying it? Through it we can help people to see how the literature of the Bible developed, and this is an important phase of religious education. We shall note this book as our first example of a prophet's written speeches, and the beginning of a great prophetic literature, of which we shall present many important examples. We shall note the customary combination of exalted poetic form with oratorical purpose. The type of argument is also characteristic of the prophet. The address opens with facts upon which the speaker and his hearers agree but concludes with denunciation as if he said, "Yes, it is true that . . ." or, "Yes, and for this very

reason. . . .” That is, he leads his audience with him a certain distance, and then turns upon them.

Addresses of this prophet should be read aloud if possible, and both listener and reader must be equipped with at least a minimum of information which will enable them to picture the political and social situations already described, for they were as familiar to Amos as the life in our own country and our own cities is to us.

Now as to the ideas which Amos emphasized. Can we relate them to modern life? God is powerful over nations. His relation to Israel entails responsibility. In modern terms *especially favored nations have special responsibilities*.

Israel has disregarded the will of God by acts of oppression, extortion, inhumanity, greed. In modern as well as ancient times *social injustice is intolerable to God*.

The people have sought to keep his favor by multitudinous offerings and elaborate ritual, following their own ideas of what would give him pleasure. *Church-going does not insure God's favor*.

They have blindly believed themselves to be secure in his favor. *Beware of blind security; look facts in the face*.

Their moral corruption has so estranged God that he has resolved to punish his people. *Moral corruption separates man from God*.

The method of his punishment will be war from without, that is, invasion. *Punishment is the inherent result of sin itself*.

The only way in which his wrath can be turned aside is by a complete reversal of attitude. *The breach between God and man can be mended only by a changed life*.

This is all very simple reasoning, which experience and the facts of modern life, when religiously interpreted, bear out in the life of nations or of individuals. Are not the efforts of those who would bring about a better social order today

directed at just the things which Amos was denouncing—greed, dishonesty, selfishness, the oppression of the poor, lack of political and personal morality. His remedy is the one needed today. With slightly varying phraseology, the denunciations of Amos can be here and now repeated with equal justice. The reversal of attitudes, aims, and conduct is the only remedy.

How shall we make this message impressive? We can moralize about it and be ineffective. But, by clothing it in the atmosphere of these ancient times, we may be able to give to our pupils the sense of the ancient character of the fight for social justice which still goes on, and perhaps to inspire them to take part in the struggle.

Without the story of Amos, these adjurations might fall flat because of their very familiarity, but coupled with the story of this heroic and historic personality they immediately gain life. There is little emotional reaction from such a statement as "Hate evil and love good," but in the mouth of Amos, perhaps at the old sanctuary, in the midst of the crowds at a great religious festival, where the soul of the nation is being poured out in prodigious offerings and gorgeous ritual, the words gain immeasurably; they become living, and the emotional response to them may be in a person inspired to take upon himself the task of Amos.

If one is leading a high-school group he may find members who, after the story of Amos, may like to present some of his orations—a series, perhaps, or one comprehensive speech built from bits of all his speeches.

A very interesting original play can be built up from the scene in chapter 7; Amos' visit to Bethel, the great sanctuary, the priests, the king, the speeches of Amos, and his expulsion.

Material for a debate may be found in the social questions

which Amos presents. How has our own day or our own community sought to solve them? Have we made progress in the centuries since his time?

Dealing with younger boys and girls, the author has had some success, in a course seeking to introduce children of nine to twelve years of age to the Bible, by using Amos as a typical example of an Old Testament preacher.⁵ It may be of some value to insert here the outline of how this was done.

1. Informal talk about sermons, preachers, the spirit of modern sermons.
2. Description of a preacher of Old Testament times, his appearance, dress (Sargent's frieze of the prophets, or of a single one of his prophets, is useful here); the place where he preached, streets, temple courts, anywhere where there was a crowd of people; the spirit of his preaching.
3. The title "prophet"; its meaning, "speaker" for God.
4. A vivid word picture of the times of Jeroboam II; luxury, splendor, extravagance, on the one hand, extreme poverty, and oppressed classes, on the other; extravagant worship, security, and joy, coupled with failure to understand God and his requirements of honesty, kindness, responsibility.
5. Word picture of Amos, his life in the country, his idea of God, his attitude toward such extravagance in worship, his belief that God demanded right living, and would punish greed, dishonesty, oppression, and selfish living. A story of the visit of Amos to Bethel, at the time of the annual pilgrimage of the king, whose palace was in Samaria. Reading from the Bible the following: Amos 3:9-15; 4:1-11; 5:3, 11, 12, 14, 15, 21-27. Then a description of his coming into the very presence of the great priest and the splendid altar of gold, in the midst of the religious ceremonies, reading 7:10-17. Messages should as far as possible be kept in the strong majestic language in which they now stand, but to change a word or phrase which will block the thinking is quite legitimate. Beautiful language has great power to impress children.

⁵ G. L. Chamberlin, *Introduction to the Bible for Teachers of Children* (2d ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926).

6. The question whether some of the evils which Amos rebuked exist today may be discussed. What can we do about them? Do they have their beginnings perhaps in attitudes of boys and girls, such as —— (contributions of ideas from the group).

The one great essential in using this prophet is that the teacher himself shall live in the person of the prophet and shall confront for himself the problems which faced Amos. If he does this, and can help his pupils to have the same experience, he can be certain that, sooner or later, occasions will rise in the lives of his boys and girls, when the picture of Amos which he lodges in the minds of his pupils will inspire some courageous action in the interest of others, or some renunciation of that which is harmful to society. The service of this Book of Amos in religious education may thus be established.

CHAPTER IX

A PROPHET'S PERSONAL AND NATIONAL PROBLEM ENLARGES HIS IDEA OF GOD

THE BOOK OF HOSEA

IN OUR study of Amos we found ourselves sympathizing deeply with the severity of his judgments and his heroism in presenting them. If we recall the total picture, however, we shall not be satisfied to accept, without modification, his harsh theology which left no room for love and forgiveness. It is a very interesting and significant fact that only a few years later, in the heart of the north country at Samaria, there lived a prophet whose message has quite a different aspect. The period following the death of Jeroboam (II Kings 15:8-25) was politically and religiously chaotic. Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam, who succeeded him, was within six months assassinated by a conspirator, who in turn died at the hand of Menahem of Tirzah. Menahem held his throne for ten years by virtue of the slaughter of all persons of doubtful loyalty and by the payment to Assyria of an enormous tribute, finally dying a natural death. His son, succeeding him for one year, died by the hand of Pekah, a conspirator from the land of Gilead across the Jordan, about 736 B.C.

As an accompaniment of such political chaos as this, fear, social disintegration, lack of confidence in friends or foes, and religious hysteria were widespread. Heavy tribute was paid to Assyria, although of her desire to aid many were skeptical. There were spasmodic appeals to Egypt. With this divided foreign policy and demoralized internal govern-

ment, what wonder that Israel was hastening to her fall? But only a few years had passed since the splendor and security of Jeroboam's reign. Any thoughtful person of those days must have wondered why this rapid fall.

Hosea, the prophet whose book we now study, lived in the midst of all these changes. He was profoundly convinced that the *immoral life of the people* was the reason for the political and social chaos. A characteristic of this immorality, as he saw it, was a revival of the ancient Baalism, from which the people had never been completely divorced. Remember that Baal had been considered the god of production and prosperity. The Baals were the old gods. The Lord was a comparatively new God in the land. His worship had from the beginning been carried on from time to time at the very sanctuaries which had been the scenes of Baal worship, the old Canaanitish sanctuaries, the high places. Perhaps some of the very images that had characterized these altars still remained. At all events, images were used in the days of Hosea, for he specifically mentions them.

"They sacrificed to the Baals,
And made offerings to idols" [11:2].

"They made kings; but it was not of my doing;
They made princes; but without my knowledge.
Of their silver and their gold they made
Idols for themselves, that they might be cut off [8:4].

"A maker of images is Ephraim;
He has set up for himself a fat bull!
They have grossly apostatized;
They love shame more than their glory.
A wind shall carry them away in its wings;
And they shall be ashamed of their altars" [4:17-19].

Since it was still believed that each nation had its own gods, and that political alliances meant homage to the gods of

other lands, it would not have been strange if there had been also at these sanctuaries Assyrian idols, or those of Egypt. That is, people would be going to these sanctuaries to worship such gods as they chose, and some of them to worship Israel's God. To Hosea this was religious tragedy, apostasy to the Lord, the only legitimate God of the Hebrews.

"I loathe your bull, O Samaria;
My anger blazes against them;
How long will they be incapable of innocence?
For from Israel is it;
A mechanic made it;
And it is not God.
Indeed, Samaria's bull
Shall become splinters.

"For they sowed the wind;
And they shall reap the whirlwind.
The standing grain which has no sprout shall yield
no meal;
If it should yield, foreigners would devour it.
Israel shall be devoured;
Soon shall they be among the nations
Like a worthless thing.
For they have gone up to Assyria,
Like a wild ass wandering by itself;
Ephraim gives love-gifts.
But though they hire among the nations,
I will soon gather them up;
And they shall cease a while from anointing a king
and princes" [8:5-10].

There is a great deal of confusion with reference to Hosea's message. His book is said to have the most imperfect text of any prophetic writer. It has been mutilated by time, lost, and confused. It does not read, as did the Book of Amos, smoothly and in beautiful strophes; there are violent breaks, so that one cannot read it straight through with

comfort. We shall take selections from it and depend upon deeper students of the book to give us the key. Even among them there is a variation of opinion.

The opening chapters are *interwoven* with what appears to be the story of the marriage of Hosea (chaps. 1 and 2). Some think that Hosea entered into marriage with an already immoral woman, believing that God had commanded him to take this step, in order that he himself might become a picture of the relation between unfaithful Israel and her God. Others, unable to accept this view, feel that there are two stories of the marriage of Hosea and that Hosea's own story (3:1-5) is a story of the redemption of his wife, after she had borne him children and gone away, leaving him and them, although he still loved her deeply.¹

We shall try to appreciate the word of Hosea by assuming the fact that Hosea's love for his wife was genuine and that his marriage was real, not allegorical. Assuming this, the picture is that of a loving husband, a broken marriage, a family forsaken, the redemption of the wife from slavery by her faithful husband, and the restoration of the home. Possibly out of deep and bitter experiences like that Hosea spoke to his people.

¹ Scholars in the last few years have seemed to prefer the first of these positions, but it involves moral and psychological difficulties, and neither view can be fully proven. Since we are trying not so much to defend particular views as to see the way in which a historical approach to the study of the books brings the characters to life, we state both views but choose one for interpreting the literature. In any case there was an unfaithful wife who was made to typify an unfaithful people, and a faithful husband who demonstrated a faithful God. George Adam Smith, in his *Book of the Twelve Prophets*, and Henry T. Fowler, in his *History of the Literature of Ancient Israel*, are defenders of the "real-marriage" theory, and J. M. P. Smith and O. E. Oesterley of the other. The unbreakable bond between God and his people is the outcome of both views. If we take the view of the "forced marriage," we shall be limited in our use of the book to mature years.

In their following after the Baals, their fickle political attitudes, and their gross immorality of all sorts, some of which he names and specifically condemns, he later sees a picture of his own broken life. But he himself has risen above that and has restored his home and his relationship with his wife. His spiritual inference is: God can do the same. God will discipline his people severely but not to the death. He will take them back, notwithstanding their idolatrous apostasy and their moral guilt, and in the end restore them to his favor, because he loves them. That is the note which Amos lacked, but which we find most abundantly in the Book of Hosea.

He attacks the prevailing worship (4:1-19), quarreling with priests and prophets who seem not to be above the average of the people in their dissipation and extortion and in their irresponsible direction of worship. They are "like a harlot," false to God, and finding their shameful satisfaction in the worship of images. The princes of both northern and southern Israel are included in the picture of condemnation (5:1-4), which is followed by a threat of ruin, through the very Assyria to which they have appealed for help. A shallow repentance of Israel is pictured, confidence in the Lord as evanescent as the morning dew, and having no relation whatever to moral living (5:15-6:11). The corruption is compared to the heat and sickness of drunkenness.

"When I would restore the fortune of my people,
When I would heal Israel,
The guilt of Ephraim is revealed,
And the sin of Samaria;
For they have wrought falsehood,
And the thief comes in;
Gangs prowl about.
But they never realize

That I shall remember all their wickedness,
That now their deeds encircle them,
That they are before my face.
Through their wickedness they rejoice the king,
And through their treachery princes.
They are all adulterers;
They are like a burning oven,
Whose baker ceases stirring,
From the time the dough is kneaded until
it is leavened.
From the day he became king, the princes
have made him sick with the heat of wine;
Worthless men have made him drunk.
For their heart glows like an oven, with
their trickery;
All night through their anger sleeps;
In the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.
They are all hot like an oven,
And they devour their rulers.
All their kings have fallen;
There is no one among them who calls
upon me" [6:11b—7:7].

The nation is "like a silly dove," vacillating in its calls for help between Egypt and Assyria, and turning to Baal gods for help. Destruction must come as a result of such idolatry and disloyalty (continuing chaps. 7 and 8).

"For Israel forgot his maker and built palaces;
And Judah multiplied fortified cities;
But I will send a fire upon his cities,
And it shall devour his palaces" [8:14].

Exile at the hands of Assyria is definitely predicted, irreparable ruin (9:1—10:15). The punishment is fully elaborated, and the prophet presses his people, and again pronounces their doom, because they had "ploughed wickedness" and must "harvest disaster."

“Sow for yourselves righteousness;
Reap the fruit of piety;
Break up your fallow ground;
For it is time to seek the LORD,
Till he come and rain righteousness upon
you” [10:12],

At this point we come upon a great chapter which repays us for our study of the Book of Hosea.

“When Israel was a child, I came to love him,
And from Egypt I called him.
The more I called them,
The more they went away from me;
They sacrificed to the Baals,
And made offerings to idols.

“But it was I who taught Ephraim to walk;
I took them up in my arms;
But they did not know that I cared for them.
With human lines I led them,
With loving cords;
And I became for them like him who lifts the yoke
from their jaws;
And I bent toward them and fed them.

“Ephraim shall return to Egypt
And Assyria shall be his king,
Because they have refused to return to me.
The sword shall begin upon his cities,
And make an end of his fields,
And shall devour his fortresses.
For my people are dependent upon a change
in me;
And if they call upon me because of the yoke,
Will I not, nevertheless, raise it up?

“How can I give you up, O Ephraim!
How surrender you, O Israel!
How can I treat you like Admah!

How make you like Zeboim!
My mind turns against me;
My sympathies also grow hot.
I will not carry out my fierce anger;
Nor will I again destroy Ephraim;
For I am God and not man,
The holy one in the midst of you;
And I will not destroy.

“They shall go after the LORD;
Like a lion he will roar;
Yea, he will roar;
And his sons shall come trembling from
the west,
They shall come fluttering like a bird
from Egypt,
And like a dove from the land of Assyria.
And I will bring them back to their homes,”
Is the oracle of the LORD [chap. 11].

The holy bond of the unspeakable love of God for Israel, although it must express itself first in deserved discipline, and unavoidable punishment, could never be wholly destroyed. Eventually his people would be drawn by the cords of love back to him and to their allegiance. This is majestic divine love which he portrays, but he found its prototype in his own life. His judgment upon his people was not alone upon their social and political sins but more bitterly upon their failure to recognize and to fulfil their relation with their God.

The text of this book has been so disturbed that we cannot depend upon the chronological arrangement of chapters or strophes. We are not surprised, therefore, to find this beautiful chapter, picturing God's love triumphant over all the dishonor of the past, followed by further reiterations of the sinfulness of the people. Even if we decide with many that

verses 10 and 11 may have been added by a later hand, we still have this wonderful description of the tenderness with which the Lord has cared for his people, notwithstanding their perpetual apostasy, and we realize how to the prophet the very nature of God forbids that he shall completely destroy this people, whom he has so deeply loved.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

Are we beginning to see how, century by century, God, through these special great souls, even in the circumstances of their lives, revealed his essential nature. Suppose that the process had stopped with Amos, and God had universally remained in men's minds as the righteous and wrathful being which Amos depicts. It was in the very nature of things that some deeply religious soul should reach out for something beyond it—something which would bring God nearer and make the situation of man less hopeless.

It is very certain that in recalling the study of these two prophets, Amos and Hosea, the teacher will, on his own behalf, feel as amply rewarded for reading from the Book of Hosea as from the Book of Amos. The question of the use of Hosea in religious education is more difficult, for the religious message seems to have its basis in the tragedy of Hosea's own life, the outlines of which are so confused and uncertain.

In the teaching experience of the author an attempt was made to pass this message on to boys and girls.

They were able to understand a story of Hosea's wife deserting her home and her children in a great city. They could feel the wrong and the sorrow brought upon the husband who loved her and the children who needed her care. They could appreciate the patient love of a husband who would continually seek her and finally buy her back from a

slave-master, having loved her all the time. Then after that appreciation they could be led to see how Hosea, reflecting upon the strange story of his own life, would think to himself: "If I can still love my wife who deserted me and her children, and go after her and bring her back, God can still love his chosen people, and he will stretch out his arms to them in love and mercy, and draw them back to himself." Perhaps he would continue: "If the people knew that the Lord was like that, some of them might turn to him again. I myself will patiently and persistently show them such a God." This was followed by reading such simple selections as the following, paraphrasing only when actually necessary.

"Hear the word of the LORD, O Israelites!
 For the LORD has a quarrel with the
 inhabitants of the land;
 Because there is no fidelity, no kindness,
 and no knowledge of God in the land,
 Cursing, lying, murder, theft, and adultery—
 They break out, and one crime follows hard
 upon another.
 Therefore the land mourns, and everything
 that dwells therein languishes,
 Even to the beasts of the earth, and the birds
 of the air;
 And the fish of the sea also are swept away" [4:1-3].

.
 "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
 What shall I do with you, O Judah?
 For your piety is like a morning cloud,
 And like the dew that goes early away.
 Therefore will I hew them by the prophets;
 I will slay them by the words of my mouth.
 And my judgment will go forth like the light.

For I delight in piety, not sacrifice;
And in the knowledge of God, rather than
burnt-offerings" [6:4-6].

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"For Ephraim has become like a silly dove,
without sense;
They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.
As they go, I will spread my net over them;
Like birds of the air, I will bring them down;
I will bind them on account of their wickedness.
Woe to them that they have wandered away
from me!
Ruin to them that they have rebelled
against me!
Can I redeem them,
While they speak lies against me?

"They do not cry unto me from their hearts,
But wail upon their couches for grain and wine;
They cut themselves and rebel against me.
Yet it was I who trained and strengthened
their arms,
While against me they plan wickedness.
They turn to the Baal;
They are like a treacherous bow.
Their princes shall fall by the sword,
Because of their stumbling speech in the land
of Egypt" [7:11-16].

.

"He himself, too shall be carried to Assyria,
As tribute to the great king.
Ephraim shall receive disgrace,
And Israel shall be ashamed of his idol.

"The king of Samaria shall be destroyed,
Like a chip upon the surface of the water.
And the high places of Aven shall be destroyed,
The sin of Israel;

Thorn and thistle shall spring up upon their
altars;
And they shall say to the mountain 'Cover us';
And to the hills, 'Fall upon us' " [10:6-8].

.

"Sow for yourselves righteousness;
Reap the fruit of piety;
Break up your fallow ground;
For it is time to seek the LORD,
Till he come and rain righteousness upon you.
You have ploughed wickedness, you have
harvested wrong;
You have eaten the fruit of lies,
In that you trusted in your chariots, and in your
great might" [10:12, 13].

The fact that the prophet was sure that the people would be carried off into Assyria as captives of war and thus punished by the Lord for their disloyalty and selfishness was emphasized. A reading of chapter 11 (pp. 177-78) after such an introduction will make a deep impression.

A discussion might follow on the basis of the fact that Hosea learned what God was like by experience. The people did not understand, for they had not the experience. One can pass from this to the question of how we learn by experience, and whether our experience has taught us anything with reference to God. Does love of nature, trees, woods, clouds, brooks, streams, and mountains help us to understand God? Does the love of parents, brothers, sisters, and friends help us to understand the love of God?

Perhaps the question may be raised, "Can boys and girls comprehend these selections?" Perhaps they could not analyze them word by word or even sentence by sentence, but they take in the general meaning and the significance in the situation. In a questionnaire submitted to ten-year-olds

after about forty stories from the Bible during a school year, in answer to the question, "Which stories did you like best?" the majority choice was "stories of the baby Jesus, and *the story of Hosea*." The reason for this choice is possibly the fact that up to that age in a church group the family has figured most largely in experience, and these are family stories.

This book may have a larger message to us than to our pupils because of our difficulties in presenting it, but we can at least use it comfortably with young people and with adults. It brings into the religion of the Hebrews at this time an element of spirituality that is vital. It also inaugurates anew that deadly fight against idolatry which characterized the work of the prophets in succeeding generations.

CHAPTER X

ISAIAH, THE PROPHET OF HOLINESS

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH, CHAPTERS 1-39

WE TURN now to another of these luminous pictures of the Hebrew prophets. Chapters 1-39 of the Book of Isaiah come from the prophet of that name. There may perhaps be a few insertions from later times, but they will not disturb us.

The chronological table below represents the period during which Isaiah was active—half a century of desperate tragedy at the center of which he stood, warning, directing, encouraging, and suffering, while four succeeding kings lived and died in Jerusalem.

B.C.

- 745-727 Tiglath-pileser IV was king of Assyria.
- 743-738 Assyria continued the campaign in Syria, placing it under tribute.
- 735-715 Ahaz was king of Judah.
- 735 Alliance of northern Israel and Syria against Judah, and attempt to compel Ahaz of Judah to join them. They invade Judah but are repulsed. Ahaz appeals for help to Tiglath-pileser, thus becoming a vassal of Assyria and subject to heavy tribute.
- 734 Tiglath-pileser, dissatisfied with his vassal states, destroys Damascus, invades northern Israel, carrying away many inhabitants and placing a vassal king, Hosea, upon the throne.
- 727 Shalmaneser IV now king of Assyria.
- 725-721 Syria and Israel rebel, Samaria is besieged and captured by an Assyrian general, thus ending northern Israel as a separate state.
- 721-710 Sargon, now king of Assyria, renews his hold on Syria and also meets an uprising in Babylon.

- 715-688 Hezekiah, king of Judah.
 712-700 Attempts are made in Egypt to incite a revolt of Palestinian and Syrian states against Sargon.
 711 Sargon invades Syria and Palestine but is drawn away.
 705 Sennacherib, king of Assyria. Revolt spreads in Palestine.
 701 Sennacherib invades to punish, besieges Jerusalem, defeats Egyptian army, and returns to Assyria, leaving Judah subdued and tributary.

While the first Isaiah, as we shall call him, was active during most of this long period, his speeches were probably collected by the many "disciples" to whom he sometimes refers. Most of them fall into two main groups, the first of these collections having to do with the invasion into the west of Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, and the second with similar invasions of Sargon and Sennacherib. They picture as fact what Amos only feared and Hosea saw inevitable.

The scene of action changes with this prophet to Judah and Jerusalem and remains there until Jerusalem falls. King Uzziah or Azariah in Judah was contemporaneous with Jeroboam II of northern Israel, and for similar reasons he had a long and prosperous reign. He was, however, early stricken with leprosy, Jotham, his son, becoming regent. A highly colored story of his reign and the cause of his leprosy is found in II Chronicles (chap. 26). Leprosy was always interpreted as a special scourge, sent upon its victims by God as a punishment for some sin.

Let us examine this vision a little more closely. We may legitimately imagine Isaiah walking through the city streets, it may be in meditation on the recent death of the leprous king, with its reminder of the moral evils of the city in which he lived. Seeking the comfort of the presence of God, who was always thought to be dwelling in the temple, he enters it. In this sacred place his mind swings completely over from the spectacle of corruption, idolatry, and the

falseness of men, of which he had been thinking, to the opposite extreme, the holiness of God. His spirit rested in that elevated mood. It was then that he saw the vision of God which he describes, accompanied by angelic music in the refrain "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts."

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and uplifted, with the skirts of his robe filling the temple. Over him stood seraphim, each having six wings, with two of which he covered his face, with two he covered his loins, and with two he hovered in flight. And they kept calling to one another, and saying,

"Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts;
The whole earth is full of his glory."

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the sound of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

Then said I,

"Woe to me! for I am lost;
For I am a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell among a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King,
The LORD of hosts."

Then flew one of the seraphim to me, with a red-hot stone in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar; and he touched my mouth with it, and said,

"See! this has touched your lips;
So your guilt is removed, and your sin
forgiven."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying,

"Whom shall I send,
And who will go for us?"

Whereupon I said,

"Here am I! send me."

So he said,

"Go and say to this people:
'Keep on hearing, but understand not;
And keep on seeing, but know not!'

Make the mind of this people gross,
Dull their ears, and besmear their eyes;
Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with
 their ears,
And have a mind to understand, and turn,
 and be healed."

Then I said,
 "How long, O LORD?"

And he said,
 "Till cities lie waste, without inhabitant,
 And houses without man;
 And the soil be left a desolation,
 And the LORD have removed man far away,
 And many be the forsaken places in the midst
 of the land.
 Even if a tenth remain in it,
 This must pass through the fire again,
 Like a terebinth, or an oak,
 Whose stump remains when it is felled."
 [A holy race is the stump of it.] [chap. 6.]

We shall see as we move on that this conception of the holiness of God strongly characterizes our heritage from this prophet.

The reaction which ensues is inevitable. Isaiah compares himself with this holiness, and despairs. (Recall the old tradition that no man could look upon the face of God and live; Moses was said to have covered his face with a veil when he went into the mountain to speak with God, and the Holy of Holies within the temple was veiled, and entered only by consecrated priests.) But he had not sought the vision. It had come to him. As the vision unfolds he sees its reason. This vision of God was sent to convince him of his own fitness for a supremely great task, namely, to turn the thoughtless nation toward a life which this holy God might approve. Only Isaiah knew what a colossal task that would

be. But, inspired by the vision, he undertook it. In the story of this experience written years later we see the reflection of failures and discouragement. But he reasons that the very blindness and deafness of the people to his message were decreed by God. If he would still be worthy of his great task, he must continue. After bitter desolation of the land a small remnant worthy of the salvation of God may remain, and he must carry on for its sake, for through it, eventually, God may be able to save the nation.

His fellow-countrymen had not listened to his word, but disciples had gathered about him, and through them he might hope for the perpetuity of his message.

I will bind up my testimony, and seal my teaching in the heart of my disciples. Then I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Israel; I will set my hope on him, while I and the children whom the LORD has given me remain as signs and symbols in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion [8:16-18].

We recall that the circumstances of King Uzziah's death made this year especially significant to the prophet. Later writers believed that the king's sin was the desecration of the altar of God by himself presuming to offer the sacrifice. At all events, for all those years of his illness he had been accounted accursed, and his death might be regarded by Isaiah as the door of opportunity. From the first chapters of Isaiah we may secure suggestions of conditions which surrounded him.¹ He alludes to faithless children of God, false worship, the wages of sin, rampant crime, magic, treasure, and idolatry. If he had in him the spirit of a prophet, it is little wonder that Isaiah went into action, even in face of the hopelessness of the moral situation.

Politically, there was no hope of evading the enveloping power of Assyria. In the estimation of a prophet, God was

¹ 1:2, 3, 10-17, 18-20, 21-23; 2:5, 6, 7, 8.

the only source of help. But how could the immoral, the desecrated, Israel expect help from God, "the Holy One of Israel"? The young man turns from a great vision to a prophetic task. We can well imagine that, in the bitterness of disappointment in the experience of the ensuing years, he represents God as telling him from the first how fruitless his work would be.

An interesting example of Isaiah's skill as orator and poet is found in the song of the vineyard, possibly given upon some occasion of assembly.

Let me sing for my Loved One
My love song of his vineyard.

My Loved One had a vineyard
On a fertile hill;
He dug it, and cleared it of stones,
And planted it with choice vines;
He built a watchtower in the midst of it,
And hewed out a winevat;
And he expected it to yield grapes,
But it yielded wild grapes.

Now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah,
Judge, I pray, between me and my vineyard!
What more could have been done for my vineyard
Than that which I have done for it?
Why, then, when I expected it to yield grapes,
Did it yield wild grapes?

So now, I pray, let me tell you
What I will do to my vineyard:
I will remove its hedge, so that it shall be ravaged;
I will break down its wall, so that it shall be trampled down;
I will make it a waste, unpruned and unhoed,
That shall spring up with briars and thorns;
And the clouds will I command
That they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel,
And the men of Judah are his cherished plantation;
He looked for justice, but lo! bloodshed,
For righteousness, but lo! a cry [5:1-7].

He commences with a winning stanza, a song about a vineyard, planted, cultivated, and protected, well cared for by its owner but, after all this protection and cultivation, yielding only wild grapes. He calls upon those who listen to say what shall be done with this vineyard, upon which the owner's care has been futile and unrewarded. They follow him eagerly as he denounces the vineyard and describes the punishment which it deserves, the removal of the protecting hedge, the breaking-down of its wall, and the visitation of drought. Not until he has fully captured the imagination of the people, and their sympathy in this deserved devastation, does he turn upon them with the assertion that *they* are the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts, Israel and Judah alike; for where God had looked for justice he had found only bloodshed, and his search for righteousness had uncovered only the cry of the oppressed.

Denunciations characterize the early work of Isaiah. The following is sweeping:

For see! the Lord, the LORD of hosts,
Is removing from Jerusalem and from Judah both stay
and staff—
All stay of bread and all stay of water—
Soldier and warrior, judge and prophet, diviner
and elder,
Captain of fifty, and man of rank,
Counselor, skilful magician, and expert enchanter.
And boys will I give them for princes,
And children shall rule over them;
And the people shall play the tyrant over each other,
Everyone over his neighbor;

And rudely shall they behave, the youth toward the
 old man,
 And the base man toward the honorable.
 When a man lays hold of his fellow in his father's house:
 "You have a mantle—you shall be our leader,
 And this heap of ruins shall be under your hand";
 On that day will he protest, saying,
 "I will not be a healer;
 For in my house there is neither bread nor mantle;
 You shall not make me leader of this people!"
 For Jerusalem has stumbled,
 And Judah has fallen;
 Because their words and their deeds are against
 the LORD,
 Provoking his glorious eyes.

Their partiality in judgment bears witness against them,
 And like Sodom they publish their sin without
 concealment.
 Woe to them! for ill have they done to themselves.
 Happy the righteous! for well shall they fare;
 For the fruit of their deeds they shall eat.
 Woe to the wicked! ill shall they fare;
 For the work of their hands shall be paid back to them.
 My people! babes are their masters,
 And women rule them.
 My people! your leaders mislead you,
 And confuse the paths you should follow [3:1-12].

Hope that his country could withstand political disaster could only be based upon complete reversal of the lives of the people. God could have no interest in saving them; they were not worth it. Thus his thought would run.

But political disaster loomed dark on the horizon. The coast regions of Syria and northern Israel, and perhaps others of the smaller western dependencies of Assyria, were challenged by her difficulties with distant provinces and her engrossing activities in suppressing them. In this oppor-

tune moment these border states, including northern Israel, joined in an alliance which they hoped would free them from the dominance of Assyria. They could not expect to be successful without the co-operation of Ahaz, king of Judah and Jerusalem. They appealed to him, threatening invasion, if he did not join them. Here was a crisis which called for action on the part of Ahaz. We are not able to fully understand his attitude, but in all probability in anticipation of this situation, and having no faith in the success of even a triple alliance against powerful Assyria, he had already appealed to that country secretly and had been assured of her protection. At all events, when the Syrians moved into northern Israelitish territory, he was panic-stricken. "His heart and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind." We find by reference to II Kings 16:5-6 that the northern kings did attack Judah, but whether Ahaz had appealed to Assyria before or after Isaiah's visits we cannot be sure.

Ahaz, taking account of his war resources, was confronted by Isaiah. Aware of the alarm of the king and feeling himself commissioned by the Lord, he went out to meet Ahaz at the source of the water supply which he was inspecting in prospect of war. Isaiah, apparently, had no direct knowledge of Ahaz's appeal to Assyria. He feared that the king would ignore God and his dependence upon him and make an alliance with Assyria, or that he would go in with the northern neighbors, foster the rebellion, and be wiped out. The prophet must get in his word while there is yet time, although he is not certain how far Ahaz's negotiations have gone. We hear him speak:

"Take care, and keep calm! Do not be afraid or down-hearted because of these two stumps of smoking firebrands, the fierce anger of

Rezin (with Syria) and the son of Remaliah.² Because Syria has plotted mischief against you, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, saying, "Let us go up against Judah, and throw it into a panic, and make a schism in it to our interest, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it," thus says the Lord God:

"It shall not stand, and it shall not be!" [7:4-7].

He then predicts the complete defeat of Syria and northern Israel (7:8-9). But neither Isaiah nor Ahaz can picture the destruction of these two countries without realizing the terrific danger to Judah in the devastation of the north.

Evidently, Ahaz did not show alarm or intention of calling upon the Lord for protection. Isaiah probably learned later that an alliance had already been made with Assyria against the two northern nations. At all events he again visited the king, this time in his palace (7:10-17). He demanded that Ahaz test the truth of his message by seeking a sign from God and promises that such a sign shall be fully met. Ahaz, perhaps conscious that it is already too late, refuses the test. In anger Isaiah turns on him, with a sign, whether he will or not. Pointing to a young woman present who is carrying an unborn child, he says, "Before that child shall be old enough to choose between good and evil [possibly three years] the land, whose two kings you now dread, will be forsaken. The devastating armies of the Assyrians will not stop at the border of northern Israel, but they will come on into Judah." There follows a great poem, picturing the utter desolation of the land and the poverty of its inhabitants.

It shall come to pass on that day,
That the LORD will whistle for the fly,
That is at the sources of the streams of Egypt,

² The son of Remaliah, Pekah, king of northern Israel; Rezin, king of Syria. Son of Tabeel, perhaps a rival of Ahaz, who was willing to be subservient to the will of Rezin and Pekah.

And for the bee that is in the land of Assyria;
And they will come and settle, all of them,
In the precipitous ravines, and in the clefts of the crags,
And on all the thorn bushes, and on all
the pasture grounds.

On that day will the Lord shave off,
With a razor hired from beyond the River,
even the king of Assyria,
The hair of the head and the body;
The beard also will he sweep away.

And it shall come to pass on that day,
That one will rear a young cow and a couple
of sheep;
And because of the abundant supply of milk
He will have curds for his food;
For curds and honey will be the food for everyone,
Who is left in the midst of the land.

And it shall come to pass on that day,
That every place where there used to be
a thousand vines,
Worth a thousand silver shekels,
Will run to briers and thorns;
With arrows and bow will men come there,
For all the land will be briers and thorns.

And as for all the hills that used to be hoed
with the hoe,
You will not be able to go there for fear of briers
and thorns;
But they will become a place where oxen
may be sent,
And where sheep may trample [7:18-25].

Another great prophetic poem is found in 9:8—10:4 to which we must add a fragment 5:25-30, which was probably broken off from the original. This poem falls into stanzas each ending with the stern refrain referring to God.

“For all this his anger has not turned back
But his hand is stretched out still.”

Thus the prophet proclaims God's hand of punishment in the coming of the army.

Isaiah knew the value of an appeal to the eye as well as to the ear. He set up a great tablet containing a succession of words calculated to strike terror to all who read them. "Speeding to the spoil, hastening to the prey" was the inscription. Then he gave this curious combination of words as a name to the next child who was born to him; for, said he, "before *this* child shall be able to cry 'My father and my mother,' Damascus and Samaria will be in ruins." Thus the child and the tablet were constant grim reminders of Isaiah's word (8:1-4).

As a matter of fact, Tiglath-pileser, the king of Assyria, did invade northern Israel in 734 B.C. and left a weak vassal, Hoshea, on the throne. In 732 he captured Damascus, the Syrian capital. Judah was momentarily spared. Ahaz lost his independence, however, and became fast bound to Assyria by annual tribute. He paid a formal visit to Damascus, where Tiglath-pileser received his vassals, and an interchange of courtesies took place. We learn also of the building by Ahaz of a great altar in the temple at Jerusalem, a copy of the altar at which the Assyrian monarch, Tiglath-pileser, worshiped when in Damascus (II Kings 16:7-18). To the prophets this presaged the prevailing influence of Assyria not only in politics but also in religion and was intolerable. In 727 B.C. Tiglath-pileser died, and again came rebellion in northern Israel with a leaning toward alliance with Egypt. Swift punishment from Assyria followed. Samaria, the capital of northern Israel, was besieged, and, although the city held out for three desperate years, at last in 721 B.C. it succumbed to the Assyrian general Sargon, who had seized the throne of Assyria upon the death of his master. Thousands of the people of northern Israel were taken as captives to Assyria and replaced in Samaria by

Assyrian captives of war brought from other lands, fruits of other conquests.

This siege of the northern capital Isaiah interprets in his own way, making it a warning to Judah.

Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards
of Ephraim,³

And the fading flower of his glorious beauty,
That rests on the heads of those overcome with
wine!

See! the LORD has one who is mighty
and strong,

One like a storm of hail, or a destroying tempest,
Like a storm of mighty, overwhelming waters,
That beats down to the earth with violence.

And the proud crown of the drunkards
of Ephraim

Will be trampled under foot;
And the fading flower of his glorious beauty,
That rests on the head of a fertile valley,
Will be like the early fig before summer,
Which, as soon as a man sees it,
While it is still in his hand, he swallows.

On that day will the LORD of hosts be
a beautiful crown

And a glorious diadem to the remnant
of his people—

A spirit of justice to those who preside over justice,
And of might to those who turn back the tide
of battle to the gate [28:1-6].

Then he addresses Judah:

But these also reel with wine,
And stagger with strong drink;
Priests and prophets reel with strong drink,
They are dazed with wine;

³ Northern Israel.

They stagger with strong drink, they reel amid
their visions,
They stumble while giving judgment;
For all tables are full of filthy vomit,
No place is clean [28:7, 8].

.

Therefore hear the word of the LORD,
You scoffing men,
You satirists among this people
Who are in Jerusalem!
Because you say,
"We have struck a covenant with Death,
And have formed a compact with Sheol;
So, when the overwhelming scourge passes,
It will not reach us;
For lies have we made our refuge,
And under falsehood have we hidden"—
Therefore thus says the Lord God,
"Behold, I lay in Zion a stone,
A well-tested stone,
A precious stone, as the cornerstone of a sure
foundation—
He who believes shall not be worried.
And I will make justice the measuring-line,
And righteousness the plummet."

Then hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,
And water will overwhelm the hiding-place;
Your covenant with Death will be annulled,
And your compact with Sheol will not stand.
When the overwhelming scourge passes,
You will be battered down by it;
As often as it passes, it will bear you away;
For morning by morning will it pass,
Both day and night;
And sheer terror will it be
To understand the message [28:14-19].

.

Now, therefore, scoff no more,
Lest your bands be made firm;
For a sentence of doom, complete and decisive,
Have I heard from the Lord, the LORD of hosts,
Against all the land [28:22].

In Judah the contract with Assyria held, and Jerusalem was spared for a time.

It is worth while for us to stop for a moment to think what the conditions of a three-year siege of an oriental walled city must have meant. We cannot, with Isaiah, completely denounce Samaria. There were doubtless many brave souls, willing to endure great hardships, and a city worth the sacrifice of many lives. If we could have a nonreligious history of these times, it would be of great interest. Some light is coming from the archeologists. The site of the city of Samaria was long held inviolate by the Mohammedans, who had built upon it a sacred mosque, but in recent years excavations have brought valuable testimony.

Upon the death of Ahaz, his son Hezekiah succeeded him in Jerusalem. He instituted great internal reforms (II Kings 18:1-6), but, following the example of his father, he at first remained consistently pro-Assyrian. However, Sargon, now king of Assyria, was dealing with a great number of insurrections among his conquered people. Hezekiah, persuaded by emissaries from Philistia and Egypt, dared to join with them in a revolt from the overlordship of Assyria, in 711 B.C. Sargon, fresh from dealing wholesale punishment to revolting cities, invaded Palestine, severely punished the Philistine city of Ashdod, and retired, leaving Jerusalem a vassal but still untouched. Sargon's death followed soon, and he was succeeded by Sennacherib, his leading general. Again there were outbreaks in middle portions of the Assyrian empire led by Merodach-Baladan of

Babylon, one of the remote powerful provinces of Assyria. He paid a visit to Hezekiah in Jerusalem evidently with the purpose of securing his co-operation. Hezekiah was condemned by the prophets for exhibiting to this powerful visitor the treasures of the temple and bestowing upon him royal gifts. However, Sennacherib was not long in subduing the rebellion throughout his kingdom, and he completed the campaign by fighting with Egypt. Of course, Judah was invaded. The story tells us that forty-six of the outlying towns about Jerusalem were destroyed and that the city itself was besieged.

We have one indication of Isaiah's active opposition during this period of Egyptian sympathy which brought Sennacherib in a march of harsh repression down the coast to Egypt. Isaiah could brook no appeal to an outside nation, Egypt, no more than Assyria. With his tendency to graphic acts, he discarded his garments, and, simulating a captive, for three years he walked the streets of Jerusalem as a living picture of future captivity. His own words explain (20:1-6). The invasion of Sennacherib was better understood, however, than Isaiah's dramatic warning.

Isaiah from the first regarded Assyria as an instrument in the hand of God, through which he would punish Jerusalem for all her iniquities—political, social, and religious. The prophet maintained that God held the "whip hand" and that, when he had accomplished his purpose of punishment, he would withdraw the Assyrians. The vividness of his imagination is especially impressive in the passage in which he describes the oncoming of the Assyrian army. It leaves us breathless, but perhaps it never happened that way, for the Assyrians came by another route.⁴

⁴ Some hold that a detachment may have come that way at this time.

O Assyria, rod of my anger,
And staff of my fury!
Against a godless nation I send him,
And against the people of my wrath I charge
him,

To despoil them, and to prey on them,
And to trample them down like mire
of the streets.

But not so does he think,
And not so does he plan;
For destruction is in his mind,
And to cut off nations not a few.
For he says,

"Are not my captains all of them kings?
Is not Calno like Carchemish?
Is not Hamath like Arpad?
Is not Samaria like Damascus?
Inasmuch as my hand has reached to the
kingdoms of the idols,
Whose carved images were more than those
of Jerusalem and Samaria,
Shall I not do to Jerusalem and its images,
As I have done to Samaria and its idols?"

But when the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria, and his vainglorious pride. For he says,

"By the strength of my hand have I done it,
And by my wisdom, for I have understanding;
I have removed the boundaries of peoples,
And I have plundered their treasures;
I have brought down the inhabitants to the dust.
My hand has seized like a nest
The wealth of the peoples;
And as one gathers eggs that are left,
All the earth have I gathered;
And there was none that moved a wing,
Or opened the mouth, or chirped."

Shall an ax boast over the man that hews with it
Or a saw lord itself over the man that plies it?
As though a rod were to sway the man that wields it,
Or a staff were to wield what is not wood! [10:5-15].

.

Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts:

“O people of mine who dwell in Zion, be not afraid of Assyria, when he smites you with the rod, and lifts up his staff against you, as did the Egyptians! For in a very little while my fury shall cease, and my anger shall come to an end. Then shall the LORD of hosts brandish over him a scourge like that with which he smote Midian at the Rock of Oreb; and his staff that was over the Sea shall he lift up against him, as he did against the Egyptians. And on that day shall his burden pass from your shoulder, and his yoke be removed from your neck.”

He has gone up from Pene Rimmon,
He has come to Aiath;
He has passed through Migron,
At Michmash he stores his baggage;
He has crossed the Pass,
Geba is his bivouac;
Panic-stricken is Ramah,
Gibeah of Saul has fled
Shriek aloud, O daughter of Gallim!
Hearken, O Laishah! Answer her, O Anathoth!
Madmenah has taken to flight,
The inhabitants of Gebim seek refuge.
This very day will he halt at Nob,
He will shake his fist at the mount of the daughter
of Zion,
The hill of Jerusalem.
But see! the Lord, the LORD of hosts,
Is lopping his boughs with a terrible crash;
And the lofty of stature will be hewn down,
And the tall ones will tumble.
He will strike down the thickets of the forest
with an iron ax,
And Lebanon will fall beneath the blows
of a Mighty One [10:24-34].

Isaiah carried his theory of the holiness of God to an extreme conclusion. He confidently believed that the city of Jerusalem, being the dwelling-place of God, was holy and inviolable. God could not do without the worship of his people nor could he do without his holy city. The events justified this belief to Isaiah and gave force to the confidence in God which he enjoined upon King Hezekiah again and again in the face of present invasion and destruction.⁵

During the final campaign of Sennacherib in 701 B.C. we can imagine him going about the streets of the besieged and terror-stricken city with words of comfort and admonition. It is impossible to separate the actual words of Isaiah from those of his disciples and later interpreters. The following passages seem to fit into this time, although parts of them or even the whole of some may have been written later in remembrance of this peril and the deliverance from it. They illustrate the difficulty of accurate dating of a prophet's speeches.

The LORD of hosts has sworn saying,
 "Surely as I have planned, so shall it be;
 And as I have purposed, so shall it stand—
 That I will break Assyria in my land,
 And will tread him down on my mountains;
 Then his yoke shall move from off them,
 And his burden shall move from off their shoulder"
[14:24 and 25].

.

Ah! the roaring of many peoples,
 That roar like the roaring of seas;
 And the surging of nations, that surge
 Like the surging of mighty waters!
 The nations may surge like the surging of many
 waters,

⁵ O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson, *Hebrew Religion* (London: London Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1933), pp. 290 and 291.

But he will rebuke them, and they will flee far
away,
And will be chased like chaff of the mountains
before the wind,
Or like whirling dust before the hurricane.
At eventide, lo! terror;
Before morning, it is gone.
Such is the lot of those who despoil us,
And the fate of those who prey on us [17:12-14].

See! the LORD comes from afar,
In blazing anger, and amid heavily rising banks
of cloud,
His lips filled with fury,
And his tongue like devouring fire,
His breath like a sweeping torrent,
That reaches to the neck—
To sift the nations with the sieve of destruction,
And to place in the jaws of the peoples
A bridle that leads them to ruin.
But for you will there be a song,
As in the night when a sacred festival is held,
And gladness of heart, as when one sets out with a flute,
To go to the mount of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel.
For the LORD will cause his glorious voice to be heard,
And the descent of his arm to be seen,
In furious anger, and flame of devouring fire,
Amid cloud-burst, and rain-storm, and hail
[30:27-30].

Then Assyria will fall by the sword, not of man;
A sword, not of men, will devour him.
He will flee before the sword,
And his young men will be put to hard labor;
The rock of his strength will slip away through terror,
And his officers will desert the standard in panic.
This is the oracle of the LORD, whose fire is in Zion,
And whose furnace is in Jerusalem [31:8 and 9]

Your eyes will behold the King in his beauty,
 They will see a land that stretches afar.
 You will muse on the terror that is past:
 "Where is he who counted, where is he who weighed,
 Where is he who marked down the towers?"
 You will see no more the savage people,
 The people of obscure speech, which you cannot grasp,
 Of barbaric tongue, which you cannot understand.
 You will behold Zion, the city of our festal assemblies;
 Your eyes will see Jerusalem,
 A quiet home, an immovable tent,
 Whose pegs will never be plucked up,
 And none of whose cords will be snapped [33:17-20].

Isaiah, continues to encourage the king, Hezekiah, who prays to God. He is answered by the prophet in his own person representing God. He addresses picturesque and defiant words to the Assyrian army and assures Hezekiah that that army shall not even shoot an arrow into the city, and that it shall return to its own city by the way that it came (chap. 37). The Assyrian general did return to his own country without setting foot in Jerusalem.

The only suggestion that we have as to what happened to the Assyrian army is the following:

Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and slew in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when men rose early next morning, they were all dead bodies [37:36].

1 Cor. 3:19 Secular history does not verify this story, although the campaign of Sennacherib is recorded. Jerusalem remained intact for more than a century. To us the story of the angel of the Lord seems naïve. But the Hebrews needed no further reason. To them, whatever the immediate cause, their deliverance was the direct action of their God in defense of Jerusalem and its inhabitants.⁶

⁶ Of course, there have been many attempts to solve the apparent mystery of the disappearance of the army of Sennacherib. Herodotus tells the story

Sennacherib probably had more than one reason for leaving the city intact. He had all that he really required (a heavy tribute), and he may not have thought it worth while to spend the time and strength necessary to depose Hezekiah and organize Judah as a province of the empire. Jerusalem was a fortress of great strength, and its reduction would have been very expensive to him. Hezekiah had learned a lesson, which he was not likely to forget, and the prospects of another revolt were remote. Egypt had received a crushing blow and, still more, had been shown to be incompetent to help her own allies.⁷ Sennacherib never again campaigned in Palestine. Jerusalem, however, remained a vassal of Assyria.

We know nothing more of the life of Isaiah, and it has been inferred that he perished in a great persecution of the prophets under Manasseh, the grandson of Hezekiah; but his personality and his message left a deep impression upon Hebrew life and thought. In fact, his theory of the inviolability of Jerusalem became a stumbling block in the way of later prophets who saw its fallacy. But his unflinching testing of life by the standards of his conception of the holy God is a challenging principle still. His political views changed from time to time as circumstances demanded, but never his ideals of life and his sense of responsibility. He was a statesman as well as a prophet; and up to a certain point he knew that God could not and did not change events which were the consequence of foolish politics.

There are in this book of the first Isaiah (1-39) several passages which have been very dear to the hearts of the

of a scourge of mice which nibbled the bowstrings of the warriors; others have concluded that a pestilence must have broken out, causing the army to withdraw in panic, leaving many dead on the field.

⁷ Oesterley and Robinson, *A History of Israel*, Vol. I: *From the Exodus to A.D. 135* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932).

reader of the Bible. These are descriptions of a marvelous future. There has been much discussion as to whether these really came from the hand of Isaiah or not, but the strength of opinion is against the authorship of Isaiah. They seem to reflect later days in which the people had no immediate hope of returning to Jerusalem or the rebuilding of the destroyed city. Prophets, however, reiterated the power of God and the necessity even for his own satisfaction of the restoration of the people to their own land. We have recognized in the first Isaiah a great poet, and it seems not impossible that in his confidence in God's protection of his holy city, amid the darkness of the immediate present and obedient to his liking for contrasts, he may have pictured a future ideal time, when the storms of war would be past, and, under a great leader ordained of God, a golden age might come—an age characterized by wisdom, knowledge, fear of the Lord, and, above all, peace. Such passages might be 9:2-7 and 11:1-9. If we assume that poems such as these came from Isaiah, we must conclude that they were deep-seated poetic dreams such as those dreams of universal peace in which we now indulge while war continues to break the peace of the world. Prophetic poets of today have a wider but not a more convinced public than that of Isaiah. Browning's "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world" is more optimistic than even Isaiah's dreams, but people shrug their shoulders and wait.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

Looking at this book as literature, we find ourselves dealing with disordered material. No chronological arrangement of speeches, a sort of scrapbook of great pieces collected, perhaps, by disciples of a great man whose memory was precious to a few. The glory of the poetry is overwhelming

as we imagine the circumstances which called it forth. As oratory, it is skilful and effective.

Among the characteristics of the work of this prophet we note no miracle⁸ but an increasing power in the political realm. The prophet checks the state. He might almost, at times, be said to be above the state in reality as well as in his own esteem. His messages are a wonderful combination of political sagacity, ability to use sound judgment at a critical moment, and, withal, a mystical faith dependent upon a certain religious theory about God, but the bedrock of which is a sound morality and sincere religious worship.

In every case the prophet is trying to effect the present situation to turn the tide of current immorality and current events, and so to influence some immediate crisis. Had he lived a century later, would Isaiah have lost his faith, when Jerusalem finally fell, or would he have changed his view of the necessary implications of the holiness of God? An interesting question: "Can we allow our idea of God to become fixed today, or must it always remain flexible?"

There were other aspects of fixity in Isaiah's idea of God which he shared with other prophets, such as his moral character. The idea of ceremonial holiness has grown less and less important with the passing centuries, but has not the content of the interpretation of God as a moral being been moving forward through the years? The prophets, devoted as they were to the interpretation of God, were dependent upon the world in which they lived for the scaffolding upon which they framed their philosophy. Does that suggest that we too must know the world today, and on the basis of the past and the present, in the light of the highest conception of God of our times, continually re-create a religious basis for life?

⁸ The story of the sundial (chap. 20) is a later tradition.

The prophet was, we say, inspired, but only as he combined common sense and moral judgment with inspiration did his work stand. One element only was constant, the fact that God was a moral being, demanding moral action on the part of people, who in turn were endowed with ability to grow in morality from high to higher. Each generation produced new religious leaders capable of thinking beyond the ability of the herd.

Thus we establish the principle that God uses selected persons to accomplish ends which might not otherwise be achieved. This places upon men and women today, as well as in ancient times, a heavy responsibility. The selflessness of the prophet speaks loudly at this point.

It is easy to go on indefinitely piling up ideas concerning the religious values of such a book as Isaiah's to our present time, so far as grown people are concerned, always reminding ourselves that Isaiah was not a finality but a link in a chain. We have sought only to stimulate independent thinking.

But what about youth? Can they gain inspiration from the study of Isaiah? To those who love to give orations, Isaiah furnishes a rich supply, always to be prefaced by a picture of the political or social crisis of the hour.

The writer has seen a reverent dramatic presentation of the call of Isaiah in the Temple drawn from his later story of it. There was wonderful play of imagination among the boys and girls of adolescent years, who gave this play.⁹

There are innumerable debatable questions, such as: Can a really great religious leader be partly right and partly wrong? Can God use people's honest mistakes as well as their successes in building a future? Experience of history

⁹ Directed by E. May Munsell at Chautauqua, N.Y.

should be brought to the answer of these questions. What about modern leaders? What shall we do when we feel them to be partly wrong and partly right? What were the elements of Isaiah's courage?

A story of Isaiah illustrated by appropriate, well-prepared readings is interesting and vivid. Suggestions for such a one, suitable to boys and girls as young as nine to twelve years, might be as follows:

Explaining the fact that Jerusalem had already acknowledged the authority of the Assyrian king, in return for his promise of protection, tell the story of Hezekiah's rebellion from Assyria and the coming of the Assyrian army, as described in II Kings, chapters 18 and 19, and Isaiah, chapters 36 and 37, omitting the last paragraph, which contains the final result of the siege.

Describe the conditions in the city during the siege; lack of food and water, the wounded, sick, and dying; no one going in or out of the city gates; the constant fear that the defense of the city was useless and that soon the Assyrians would enter and burn and pillage the city, carrying men, women, and children into captivity.

Picture Isaiah going about the city, cheering and encouraging the soldiers, stimulating them to renewed efforts, persuading the king and his household to postpone surrender, and proclaiming everywhere that the Assyrian army was powerless against God, for God had said that the Assyrians should not enter the city but would surely be sent back to their own land.

Read to the group the following specimens of the sermons which Isaiah preached in those trying days, paraphrasing in a few sentences 10:5-19: "O, Assyria, thou art only a rod in my hand," says God. "Boast not thyself of thy many conquests, of the capture of even Samaria, saying thus will I do to Jerusalem, for it is I who permitted you to do this. Your end is near. I am about to consume your great army as with a flame of fire." Read verses 24-27, the prophet's words of encouragement, and verses 28-34, the approach of the army as seen in the imagination of the prophet; 14:24-27; 17:13-14; 30:27-31; 33:1-12, 17-24. Turn now to 37:36-37 and read the outcome of the siege. The angel of the Lord, that is, death, smote the Assyrian army and destroyed it so completely that the

remaining portion of it hastened in terror back to Assyria. (In order not to be wearisome, omit one or more of the foregoing passages if the interest seems to flag.)

Discuss very simply with the group the source of Isaiah's confidence that this deliverance would come. Suppose he had lost his confidence, what would have happened to the city? Did everything depend on Isaiah holding out and making the king and people hold out with him? How hard is it to hold on when people all about tell us it is useless? Is it worth while? Is it like great men? Is it like God?¹⁰

One general inference: great religious ideas may be ours not because a prophet of God uttered them, or because they are in an inspired Bible, but only in so far as we can re-create them in the environment of our lives today. We do not say, therefore, "Isaiah said so and so; he was God's prophet; he must have been right; we must follow him," but rather, "Under what circumstances did he say it, what fundamental belief led him to say it? Was he right for his times? Is he right for our times?" Only thus does the Bible become a guide for life and conduct.

¹⁰ Adapted from Georgia L. Chamberlin, *An Introduction to the Bible for Teachers of Children* (2d ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926).

CHAPTER XI

THE PROPHET IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

THE BOOK OF MICAH

THE siege of Jerusalem, which kept its citizens in fear for so long and in which Isaiah was absorbed, was no less terrifying to the people in the country districts of central and western Judah. There, too, a prophet was busy. We find in the little book of Micah, a countryman, reflections of the situation as dark as those of which Isaiah spoke. Indeed an inscription tells us that forty-six small fortified cities belonging to Hezekiah were taken. That meant that the villages and country districts were overrun. Without the protection of walls and fortifications such as Jerusalem enjoyed, crops were burned, agriculture brought to a standstill, and inhabitants driven out of their burning villages.

Many of these country districts had passed out of the hands of their original rural owners. One of the activities which had characterized the recent prosperity was the buying-up of lands by the rich, and the concentration of property in great estates, the owners of which did not necessarily live upon them. In time of war such owners would certainly seek refuge in the strongest walled city, that is, Jerusalem. But the workers would be unable to desert their homes and fields. Micah, a prophet whose home was in the midst of the fertile plain of Philistia, southwest of Jerusalem, gives voice to his lack of confidence in everything except God. The theory of the inviolability of Jerusalem which Isaiah had preached was to him absurd. He saw the city as

synonymous with tyranny, oppression, greed, and dishonesty, heaped-up riches secured on the lands of his neighbors, a city as corrupt as her northern neighbor Samaria, and too corrupt for God to endure.

While Isaiah was preaching safety within the walls, Micah in the countryside was pouring out words of denunciation and doom for that same city. He denounces the rulers, capitalists, even prophets, and predicts the complete destruction of both northern and southern Israel.

Then I said,
"Hear now, you heads of Jacob,
And rulers of the house of Israel,
Is it not your place to know justice,
You who hate the good, and love wickedness,
Snatching their skin from upon them,
And their flesh from upon their bones?"

They eat the flesh of my people,
And strip them of their flesh,
And lay bare their bones and break them,
Like meat in the pot and flesh within the cauldron.

Then shall they cry unto the LORD,
And he will not answer them,
But will hide his face from them, at that time,
Inasmuch as they have done wicked deeds.

Thus has the LORD said,
Regarding the prophets who lead my people astray,
Who preach prosperity when their mouth is filled;
But if one does not put something in their mouths,
They declare war against him!

"Therefore, it shall be night for you, without vision,
And darkness for you, without divination.
For the sun shall set upon the prophets,
And the day shall become dark over them.

"The seers shall be abashed,
 And the diviners shall blush;
 And they shall all cover the upper lip,
 Because there is no answer from God."

But I am full of power,
 The spirit of the LORD, justice, and strength,
 To declare to Jacob his crimes,
 And to Israel his sins.

Hear this, now, you heads of the house of Jacob,
 And rulers of the house of Israel,
 Who abhor justice,
 And distort everything that is right;
 Who build Zion with blood,
 And Jerusalem with guilt.

Her chiefs pronounce judgment for a bribe,
 And her priests declare oracles for hire,
 And her prophets divine for cash.
 Yet they lean upon the LORD, saying,
 "Is not the LORD in the midst of us?
 No misfortune can befall us."

Therefore, because of you,
 Zion shall be plowed like a field,
 And Jerusalem shall become a ruin,
 And the temple hill a high place in a forest [chap. 3].

We do not know just what comfort this brought to his neighbors, but at least it showed them that he appreciated their sufferings. Through him we see that the ideas of Isaiah, the prophet of Jerusalem, were not universally indorsed by his fellow-prophets. Just what Micah thought when the army of Assyria, after all its devastation of surrounding country, left Jerusalem intact we cannot say. The political forecasts of the prophets often failed, but their insistence upon moral reform led to continually refining views of God as a moral being.

A passage contained in this book has given a very popular but not well-understood quotation frequently used to emphasize the social aspects of religion.

With what shall I come before the LORD,
 And bow myself before God most high?
 Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
 With calves a year old?
 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
 With myriads of streams of oil?
 Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,
 The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
 You have been told, O man, what is good,
 And what the LORD requires of you:
 (Only to do justice, and to love kindness,
 And to walk humbly with your God? [6:6-8].)

Only chapters 1-3 are, in fact, granted by students of the Book of Micah to Isaiah's contemporary.¹ All the rest is thought to have come from a much later period. The passage quoted above belongs to this late section.

It is legitimate to suggest that, of the three phrases contained in the closing lines, the third is placed last for cumulative value and additional meaning. Many people have inferred that the prophet is saying what is very acceptable to modern ears, that to deal justly and to love mercy *constitute* walking humbly with God. On the contrary, these words were uttered in days when *worship* was considered essential in religion. It is a plea for simplicity.

This section opens with an exquisite poem (4:1-5) which interests us especially because it is practically duplicated in Isa. 2:1-4. In Micah there is an additional stanza, and the whole poem reads more smoothly. The problem is: Did the later prophet quote from Isaiah or did both use a favorite poem current in Isaiah's day or did a later writer insert

¹ Some also add 6:9-16 and 7:1-6.

the section in both books? It is such occurrences as these that help us to see how the idealism of an individual became the ideal of a nation.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

So far as the use of this book in religious education is concerned, we can do little with it beyond its occasional quotable texts. The teacher will enrich his own picture of the life and thought of the Hebrews by reading it, and adult groups will be interested in it not only because of its moral attitudes but because it gives clear evidence that the prophets spoke independently so far as their interpretation of political events was concerned. They agreed, however, upon great moral issues. To Isaiah a foreign alliance was a moral issue and probably also to Micah. But the environment of Micah had focused his attention upon the rural problem. Whether in city or country however, the prophets stood for social justice. They championed the poor and condemned the rich, powerful, and extravagant through whom people anywhere were impoverished. The concentration of lands in the hands of the powerful and the consequent enslavement of their workers continually defrauded the poor of even their family inheritances, and Micah fought for the rights of all such.

For youth this book gives too meager a picture of the person of the prophet to be enjoyed. It will frequently be useful, however, as a matter of evidence for the moral idealism of the prophets in general, and especially the attitude which they took toward social injustice.

CHAPTER XII

A PROPHET IN DESPAIR. A NEW LAWBOOK

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

WE NOW come to the study of one of the most interesting and important collections of prophetic writings, the speeches of the prophet Jeremiah. The background of his activities is the last great act of the drama which was going forward between the two great ancient civilizations—the Assyrians and Babylonians in the valley of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and the Egyptians in the valley of the Nile. As we have seen, Palestine was caught in the stream of history.

On the death of Hezekiah, his son Manasseh succeeded him, entering upon a long reign of half a century (685–641 B.C.). Disregarding all the reforms of Hezekiah, perhaps feeling that they had brought disaster, he gave himself wholeheartedly to the restoration of all the religious and civil practices of Assyria and Babylonia, thus demonstrating his complete sympathy with his overlords. In the process of the restoration of idolatry in every form, and of old corrupt practices at many sanctuaries, he must have come into violent opposition not only with the prophets but with the more conservative priests. Of course, this resulted in religious persecution, bitter and long. It is generally supposed that Isaiah was one of the victims of this persecution. There is a short description of the period in II Kings (chap. 21). It was probably a time of internal prosperity and political quiet, but to the religious leaders of Israel it was anathema.

Idolatrous sanctuaries were everywhere active, the temple corrupted, religion and morality divorced, the worship of God no more than a parallel formal system, along with that of many foreign gods. After Manasseh died, his son Amon reigned only two years and inconsequently. Josiah, a grandson, inherited the throne at the death of his father, when the boy was but eight years of age (639 B.C.). Fortunately, he was taken care of by priests and prophets of God. For a long time after he became king, he appears to have been quiescent.

During that period a great menace faced Jerusalem and all Palestine. The Assyrians were weakening noticeably, having inherited weak leadership. The Scythians (in approximately 626 B.C.), a wild, unorganized people, whose home was where Russia now is and in the central highlands of Asia, swept down, invading Media and threatening Assyria and Babylonia with all their subsidiary states, including Palestine and Syria. Even Egypt feared them. They were bent on booty and killed as they went. Judah was terror-stricken as these ferocious armies swept down from the north. People from the little towns flocked into the city, probably among them Jeremiah, a young man of a priestly family, whose home was in Anathoth, near Jerusalem, a town where many of the priests officiating in Jerusalem lived. He was sensitive, modest, a poet, deeply religious, introspective, keenly observant, and saturated with the idea that religion and morality were inseparable. A crisis like this stirred him to action. We have already noted that much as today righteous men will spring into public view when the need arises, so in a crisis a prophet arose but with a more certain tone; for to the prophets political and social disasters were visitations of God. About this time Jeremiah felt himself called to become

a prophet. He himself tells us about his convictions and his fears.

The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
And before you were born I set you apart,
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Then said I,

“Ah, Lord God! I cannot speak;
For I am only a youth.”

But the LORD said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’;
For to all to whom I send you shall you go,
And all that I command you shall you speak.
Do not be afraid of them;
For I am with you to deliver you,”
Is the oracle of the LORD.

Then the LORD stretched forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me,

“See! I put my words in your mouth;
This day I give you authority over the nations and kingdoms,
To root up and to pull down, to wreck and to ruin,
To build and to plant.”

“What do you see, Jeremiah?”

I said,

“I see a twig of an almond tree.”

Then the LORD said to me,

“You have seen aright; for I am watching over my
word to put it into effect.”

A second time the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

“What do you see?”

I said,

“I see a pot blown upon, and its blower is in the north.”

Then the LORD said to me,

“Out of the north shall trouble be blown upon all the inhabitants of the land. For behold, I am summoning all the kingdoms of the north,” is the oracle of the LORD; “and they shall come and set up each his throne at

the entrances of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all her walls round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will pronounce my judgments against them for all the wickedness they have done in forsaking me, and offering sacrifices to other gods, and worshiping the works of their own hands. You, then, gird up your loins, and arise, and speak to them all that I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, lest I dismay you before them. For behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land—the kings of Judah, its princes and priests, and its common people. They shall fight against you, but they shall not overcome you; for I am with you to deliver you,” is the oracle of the LORD [1:4–19].

Notice that he says that the Lord called him when he was young and inexperienced, but assured him of his constant support, even that he would put the words that he should speak into his mouth. This sensitive youth who recoiled from such a task knew well the fate of previous prophets and the stubborn character of the forces which he would have to fight. But this was the call of God to action, as well as his promise of help. “I will make thee this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, a brazen wall. They that fight against thee shall not prevail, for I am with thee.” Like Isaiah, he doubtless recorded this experience and gave it deeper interpretation years later. It represents the struggle of his soul at that time; for an “iron man” he became in the long half-century through which he labored and endured his stubborn people.

The immediate crisis which lay back of this call may have been the oncoming of the Scythians, which he sought to interpret.¹ A “boiling cauldron” was the world of his day. The coming invasion, he declared, was a punishment for idolatry and disloyalty to God. He sketches the picture in

¹ As the Assyrian armies also came later, furnishing an appropriate background for such outbreaks on the part of the prophet, the dating of these speeches must be a matter of conjecture.

chapters 3, 4, and 5. The people have disregarded all the invitations of their God to return to him and have gloried in their sin. Now God was not only about to abandon them but was actually bringing on this terrifying scourge. Jeremiah calls upon the city to repent. Perhaps there may yet be time, he argues. He himself cannot endure to think of the destruction of his beloved land.

“Hark! on the bare heights is heard
the suppliant weeping of the children of Israel;
For they have perverted their ways,
they have forgotten the LORD their God.
Return, apostate children!
I will heal your apostasy.”

“See! we come to thee;
for thou art the LORD our God.
Truly in vain is the clamor from the hills,
the tumult on the mountains;
Truly on the LORD our God
rests the safety of Israel.
From our youth has the shameful thing devoured
the fruits of our fathers’ toil,
Their flocks and their herds, their sons and
their daughters;
So let us lie down in our shame,
and let our dishonor enfold us,
For against the LORD our God have we sinned,
both we and our fathers,
from our youth even till now,
And we have not listened to the voice of the LORD
our God.”

“If you return, O Israel,” is the oracle of the LORD,
“return to me;
If you put your detestable things out of my sight,
and waver not;
If you swear, ‘As the LORD lives,’ in truth,
in honesty, and in uprightness;

Then shall the nations invoke blessings on one
another through him, and in him shall they
glory" [3:21—4:2].

Declare in Judah, and make proclamation in Jerusalem, saying,

"Blow the trumpet through the land,
Proclaim aloud, saying,
'Gather and let us go
To the fortified cities!'
Raise a signal toward Zion,
Seek refuge, stay not;
For trouble I bring from the north,
Even dire destruction.
A lion has gone up from his thicket,
A destroyer of nations;
He has broken loose from his place,
To make your land a desolation,
That your cities may be ravaged,
And left without inhabitant.
Gird on sackcloth for this,
Lament, and wail;
For the fierce anger of the LORD
Has not turned back from us" [4:5-8].

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See! he comes up like a cloud,
his chariots like a whirlwind;
His horses are swifter than eagles—
woe to me! for we are ruined.
O Jerusalem! wash your heart of wickedness,
that you may be saved!
How long shall your evil thoughts
find lodgment within you?
For hark! a messenger from Dan,
A bearer of bad news from Mount Ephraim!
Make it known to the nations,
Announce it to Jerusalem:
"Leopards are coming from a distant land,
They lift up their voice against the cities of Judah;
Like keepers of a field, they ring her about,

For she has rebelled against me,"
is the oracle of the LORD.
"Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you,
This is the fruit of your wickedness;
It is bitter, it reaches the heart."
O my soul, my soul! I writhe in anguish!
O the agony of my heart!
My heart beats wildly within me,
I cannot keep silent!
For I hear the sound of the trumpet,
the alarm of war.
Crash follows crash,
for the whole land is ruined;
In a moment my tents are ruined,
in an instant my curtains,
How long must I see the signal,
hear the sound of the trumpet?

"It is because my people are stupid,
and know me not;
They are sottish children,
and have no understanding;
They have skill to do evil,
but know not how to do good " [4:13-22].

Behold, I am bringing upon you a nation from afar,
O house of Israel," is the oracle of the LORD—
"An ancient nation,
A very ancient nation,
A nation whose language you know not,
Whose speech you understand not.
Their quiver is like an open grave,
They are all men of war;
They shall eat up your harvest and your food,
They shall eat up your sons and your daughters;
They shall eat up your flocks and your herds,
They shall eat up your vines and your fig trees;
They shall batter down with the sword
Your fortified cities in which you trust."

"But even in those days," is the oracle of the LORD, "I will not make a full end of you. And when men ask, 'Why is it that the LORD our God has done all these things to us?' you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: As you have forsaken me, and served alien gods in your land, so shall you serve aliens in a land that is not yours' " [5:15-19].

Jeremiah seems less aloof from the city's misfortunes than Isaiah had been, less a spectator; he is in the midst of the people, suffering as they suffer but able to see, as they do not, the causes of their disaster. As with eyes of divinity he sees the iniquities of the city, and he is torn between sympathy for the sorrows of his people and his consciousness of the justice of the judgments of God. Only in the deepest mourning and repentance could the city have any hope of salvation is the burden of his cry.

His own grief finds expression particularly in the following:

My pain is incurable,
My heart is sick within me.
Hark! the cry of the daughter of my people
Far and wide through the land:
"Is not the LORD in Zion?
Is not her King in her?"
"Yes! but why have they vexed me with their images,
With their foreign vanities?"
"The harvest is past, the summer is over,
And we are not saved."

For the wound of the daughter of my people I am wounded
with grief,
I walk in mourning, horror has seized me.
Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why, then, is there no recovery
for the health of the daughter of my people?
O that my head were waters,
and my eyes a fountain of tears,
That I might weep day and night
for the slain of the daughter of my people! [8:18-22].

Also in a funeral dirge over the country and its people, as if they were already dead.

Thus says the LORD of hosts:

“Consider and call for the mourning women, that they
 may come,
And send for the skilful women, that they may make haste,
And raise a lament over us,
Till our eyes run down with tears,
And our eyelids gush with water!
For hark! a wail is heard from Zion:
‘How we are ruined!
We are bitterly ashamed, because we have had to leave
 our land,
Because we have had to give up our dwellings.’

“Hear, you women, the word of the LORD,
Let your ears receive the word of his mouth;
And teach your daughters a lamentation,
Each one her neighbor a dirge:
‘Death has climbed through our windows,
 has entered our halls,
Cutting off the children from the streets,
 the young men from the squares;
And the dead bodies of men shall fall
 like dung on the open field,
Like sheaves behind the reaper,
 with none to gather them’ ” [9:17-22].

What was the response of the people to all this? Indifferent and supercilious, their sense of danger only led them to insure their lives by increasing offerings to all gods. Jerusalem could not perish. Had not Isaiah, a prophet of God, said it? Had it not again and again proved true? The Scythian army would never be allowed to enter Jerusalem. But Jeremiah had no faith in this doctrine of Jerusalem's inviolability. He saw it even as a stumbling block to his people, giving unwarranted confidence. However, while

the Scythian army raided Philistia, and even attacked Egypt, it was turned back by the latter, and Jerusalem escaped. What a vindication of Isaiah's doctrine which had now become a religious dogma, and what a stigma upon the prophetic activity of sensitive Jeremiah!

But fear entered into the hearts of the people. The young King Josiah, in 621 B.C., instituted a drastic reform. He had been brought up by priests and prophets, and thoroughly inculcated with their idea that God alone should be worshiped. Urged on by them, Josiah started a reform in Jerusalem. The temple was but one of many sanctuaries scattered throughout the land, and even that was being desecrated by idolatrous ritual and the presence of other gods. It must first of all be thoroughly cleansed and repaired. Perhaps Josiah was already thinking that an Egyptian alliance might be profitable, and this reform was a slight gesture of independence of Assyria, since it meant tossing out Assyrian gods as well as those of other nations. The thing which interests us, however, in this cleansing of the temple is the fact that there was found concealed there a book. It purported to be from the hand of Moses, about whose name had gathered the tradition of law in Israel. It was, in fact, a recasting of all such existing laws as prophets and priests then living considered representative of God's will, with many additions, to be sure, but with a new theology. All were bound up in three great doctrines, one God, one place of worship—and that Jerusalem and the temple—and one priesthood.

It was a fearful and impressive book with its marshaling of systematic and orderly laws on every aspect of life, but on the whole kindly. It is supposed that this book now constitutes a large portion of our Book of Deuteronomy (chaps. 12-26, 28), and was the result of the co-operation of priests

and prophets in a sort of compromise, emphasizing, on the one hand, the centralization of worship in Jerusalem, which would render possible its complete control by the priests of the temple, and moral reforms which the prophets considered necessary—putting the whole under the stamp of dependable law, sanctioned by Moses, and satisfactory to God.²

It is easy for us to picture all that followed; a great cleaning-up of the land, destruction of the sanctuaries on the hills, dating from centuries back; the dismissal of their priests; burning and breaking of idols; and a compulsion to periods of worship in Jerusalem placed upon the citizens of the country. Many priests would thus become idle, for comparatively few could be used in the Jerusalem temple. The whole story is told in II Kings 22:1—23:25.

Such a forced reform could hardly have been expected to change the hearts of the people, let alone their beliefs. Jeremiah had never been satisfied that mere obedience to a law would save people. His idea of God was too fine for that. He knew that the heart of this new lawbook lay in its saturation with the idea of the love of God for the people, and his desire that obedience should be the by-product of their love. Yet Jeremiah also knew that the religion of Israel was no less formal and self-interested than it had been in the past. And so, although he and his companions did their utmost to spread the message of the new-found book, we are not surprised to see little of Josiah's reform movement remaining after his death, which came all too soon.

About fifteen years later King Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Necho, in his progress across Palestine, with an Egyptian army on its way to attack Assyria (II Kings 23:29, 30).³

² Of the book of Deuteronomy in its present form more will be said in a later chapter.

³ This is the biblical account. The records are uncertain.

No one can estimate the weight of this blow to Jeremiah. He had preached a gospel of good fortune for the people who would worship God alone and follow his commands in loving obedience, but here was the young king having done just this—having carried out a great reform restoring the worship of God to a central place in the life of the nation—killed in his early manhood. We must recall that long life was regarded as the reward of him who was righteous. What an inexplicable thing! The people might have been justified in saying that God was no better than the idols. "Look at the idolatrous reign of Manessah, his long life, and its prosperity. Now see what has happened." At all events a relapse into idolatry as serious as any in the past occurred. The demands of the prophets were unheeded or, being heeded, were turned into harmful dogmas.

The new king, Jehoahaz, reigned only three months. Suspected of infidelity by Pharaoh Necho of Egypt, to whom the nation was now a vassal, he was deposed and carried to Egypt, where he remained in exile to the end of his life. A second son of Josiah, Jehoiakim, was placed upon the throne, as a servant of Egypt.

No doubt the worship of God which the reform of Josiah had built up in the temple was continuing enthusiastically with many people who were still placing their faith in the presence of the temple in the city. But side by side with it the most flagrant idol worship was going on, probably frequently participated in by some of the same people. The more gods the better! Let us worship them all!

One day Jeremiah appeared in the very gates of the temple with one of those devastating threats that characterized the prophet. He claims that God has put the words in his mouth; only moral conduct can please Israel's God. His temple without that is only a "den of robbers." He reminds

the people of the fate of the tabernacle at ancient Shiloh where God once dwelt, a sanctuary long since destroyed. But he spoke to deaf ears.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:

“Stand in the court of the house of the LORD, and there proclaim this message. Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah, who enter by these gates to worship the LORD! Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: “Amend your ways and your doings, that I may establish your home in this place. Trust not in deceptive words, such as ‘The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD is this!’ For if you but amend your ways and your doings—if you practice strict justice toward one another, if you do not oppress the resident alien, the orphan, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place, nor run after other gods to your own hurt—I will establish your home in this place, in the land which I gave to your fathers for all time. But, as it is, you trust in deceitful words, that are of no avail. What? Steal, murder, and commit adultery, swear falsely, offer sacrifices to the Baal, and run after other gods, whom you do not know, and then come and stand before me in this house which bears my name, and say, ‘We are safe’—only to practice all these abominations! Has this house which bears my name become a robbers’ cave in your eyes? Lo! I see through it,” is the oracle of the LORD. “For go, now, to my sanctuary that was at Shiloh, where I formerly established my name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel! So now, because you have done all these deeds,” is the oracle of the LORD, “and I spoke to you early and late, but you would not listen, and I called you, but you would not answer, I will do to this house which bears my name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh; and I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, even the whole race of Ephraim.” ’ ’ ’

“As for you, intercede not for this people, nor lift up cry or prayer on their behalf, nor plead with me, for I will not listen to you. Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children are gathering wood, and the fathers are kindling fires, and the women are kneading dough, to make cakes for the queen of the heavens; and they are pouring libations to other gods, in order to vex me. But is it me they are vexing?” is the oracle of the LORD. “Is it not their own selves, to the confusion of their own faces?” Therefore

thus says the Lord God: "My anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place—upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruits of the ground—and it shall burn without being quenched" [7:1-20].

In 612 B.C. something happened which shocked the world. Assyria, which had been a powerful but never a well-knit kingdom, was conquered. She had never been able to command the allegiance of her vassal states, and rebellion in one section was too frequently the signal for other uprisings. Now, the Medes and the Babylonians joined against Assyria, and she was powerless in the hands of these combined enemies. Nineveh, her capital, which had been a synonym for power throughout the world, was razed to the ground, and, in 605, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, gave battle to the recently victorious Pharaoh Necho of Egypt, and drove him back to his own land, leaving Babylon to reign supreme in western Asia. To this monarch, therefore, Jehoiakim, the king in Jerusalem, was bound. Jehoiakim was unscrupulous, a tyrant, but to one thing he had to be true, namely, his allegiance to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar had no reason to trust any king of Judah. Egypt was too conveniently near. The enticements which she could offer had more than once outbalanced those of the east. True, Nebuchadnezzar had passed by Jerusalem in his recent defeat of Pharaoh Necho of Egypt, but Jeremiah had continued to proclaim that Nebuchadnezzar was the instrument of God, through whom he would punish a disloyal people (25:1-11). Even the prophets could not be trusted (23:9-40). Jeremiah stands alone and hopeless. Of course, Jehoiakim had no love for Jeremiah, whose predictions were always thus lugubrious, from the point of view of the self-satisfied king, safe within the walls of Jerusalem. Jehoiakim indifferently turned his attention to

building operations. Prosperity seemed to reign. Things were quiet politically. Nebuchadnezzar was leaving them alone. Jeremiah's croakings were most distasteful. Finally, the exasperated king had him arrested and confined. With him he had his faithful secretary Baruch. To him he dictated, and by him he sent a scroll which he instructed Baruch to read in the temple court on a great feast day which was at hand. Baruch, obedient to the dangerous commission, discussed with friends how it might be carried out. He was warned to hide and was told that he and Jeremiah were both in great danger. However, he did gain access to officers of the court, read the roll before them, and produced considerable excitement. So much importance was attached to this roll, which vividly described the fate of Jerusalem and even of the king, that it was taken by officials to the king himself, and by his permission read to him. In anger and disdain at such a message he destroyed the roll, slitting it into bits and burning it in the brazier (chap. 36). The news was carried to Jeremiah. With terrible persistence he again wrote, even more drastically. The bitterness in his own soul was at times so great that he even doubted the truth of his own message.

Thou hast duped me, O LORD, and I let myself
be duped;
Thou hast been too strong for me, and hast prevailed.
I have become a laughing-stock all day long,
Everyone mocks me.
As often as I speak, I must cry out,
I must call, "Violence and spoil!"
For the word of the LORD has become to me
A reproach and derision all day long.
If I say, "I will not think of it,
Nor speak any more in his name,"
It is in my heart like a burning fire,

Shut up in my bones;
I am worn out with holding it in—
I cannot endure it.
For I hear the whispering of many,
Terror all around.
“Denounce him! let us denounce him!”
Say all my intimate friends, who watch for my
tripping;
“Perhaps he will be duped, and we shall prevail
over him,
And shall take our revenge on him.”
But the LORD is with me as a dreaded warrior,
Therefore my persecutors shall stumble,
and shall not prevail,
They shall be put to bitter shame, because they
have not succeeded,
To everlasting confusion, which shall not be forgotten.
O LORD of hosts, thou who testest the right,
Who searchest the heart and the conscience,
Let me see thy vengeance on them,
For to thee have I confided my cause.
Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD;
For he has saved the life of the needy
From the hand of the wicked.

Cursed be the day on which I was born,
The day on which my mother bore me—
Let it not be blessed!
Cursed be the man who brought the good news
to my father,
“A son is born to you”—
Wishing him much joy!
Let that man be like the cities
Which the LORD overthrew without mercy;
Let him hear a cry in the morning,
And an alarm at noon;
Because he did not let me die in the womb,
That my mother might have been my grave,
And her womb have remained pregnant forever!

Why came I out of the womb,
To see trouble and sorrow,
That my days might be spent in shame? [20:7-18].

The prophet's work in these and immediately following years finds frequent illustration. An experience in the stocks after one of his temple arraignments is related in 19:14—20:6. As a matter of fact, Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Things had gone from bad to worse. The king was deeply suspected of treachery and, fortunately for him, died just in time to leave to his son the responsibility for action in this crisis. After a three-month siege of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar entered the city. He took with him when he returned to Babylon ten thousand of the best citizens of the country, great treasure, and Jehoiachin, the reigning king. He left Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, on the throne as his vassal.

Jeremiah, from this time, counseled his fellow-citizens to quietness and meekness under the yoke of Babylon, which he said had been placed upon them by their own God. He himself goes about wearing a great wooden yoke. He even contends in a picturesque scene with the court prophets in the sight of the people in the temple courts. We infer that Jeremiah replaced the yoke there broken with one of iron.

Now that same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah—in the fourth year, the fifth month—Hananiah, the son of Azzur, the prophet, who belonged to Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests and all the people, saying,

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years will I bring back to this place all the vessels of the house of the LORD which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took away from this place and carried to Babylon. I will also bring back to this place Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, with all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon,’ is the oracle of the LORD; ‘for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.’”

Then Jeremiah the prophet answered Hananiah the prophet, in the presence of the priests and all the people who stood in the house of the LORD, saying,

"Amen! The LORD do so! The LORD fulfil the words which you have prophesied, by bringing back the vessels of the LORD's house, together with all the exiles, from Babylon to this place! Listen, however, to this word which I speak in your hearing, and in the hearing of all the people! The prophets who preceded you and me, from the very earliest times, when they prophesied against mighty lands and great kingdoms, prophesied of war, famine, and pestilence. So when a prophet prophesies of peace, that prophet can be proved to be one whom the LORD has truly sent only when the word of the prophet is fulfilled."

Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, and broke it. And Hananiah said in the presence of all the people,

"Thus says the LORD: 'So will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, from the neck of all the nations within two years.' "

Then Jeremiah the prophet went on his way.

But after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying,

"Go and say to Hananiah, 'Thus says the LORD: You have broken the bars of wood, but I will replace them by bars of iron. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I will put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—and serve him they shall—and I will give him also the beasts of the field.' "

Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet,

"Hear now, Hananiah! The LORD has not sent you, but you are making this people put their trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I am sending you off the face of the ground. This very year shall you die; for you have spoken disloyalty against the LORD' " [28:1-17].

To Jeremiah the deportation was a severe blow, for the people left in Jerusalem were of the lower classes. He could not rely upon them for reform. They were too stupid to heed the lesson, and his mission became more and more hopeless. Zedekiah, the new king, had neither judgment

nor insight. He kept Jeremiah a prisoner, though evidently with some freedom. He even consulted the prophet now and then. Although Jeremiah had his friends, the situation was most distressing. He wrote a letter to the exiles in Babylon counseling patience and co-operation with their conquerors in anticipation of a long exile, which he deemed a period of discipline decreed by God.

Jeremiah had a great sense of the dramatic. The story of the Rechabites is an interesting example. This was a tribe of people descended from the Kenites, who dated back to the time of Moses. Its people were bound by a vow neither to drink wine nor to dwell in houses or cities. Out of loyalty to their common ancestor who had placed this inconvenient vow upon his descendants, they had kept to the simplicity of their old wandering, tribal life, living in tents until driven by the fear of Nebuchadnezzar's army to take refuge within the walls of the city. We have a picturesque scene, prepared by Jeremiah to impress a violent contrast between the fidelity of the old gypsy leader to his ancestral vow and the faithlessness of Israel to her covenant with God.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, as follows:

"Go to the household of the Rechabites, and talk with them, and bring them to one of the chambers in the house of the LORD, and offer them wine to drink."

So I took Jaazaniah, the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, with his brothers and all his sons, even the whole household of the Rechabites, and brought them to the house of the LORD, to the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaiah, the man of God, which adjoined the chamber of the princes, above the chamber of Maaseiah, the son of Shallum, then keeper of the threshold; and I set before the Rechabites a bowl full of wine, with drinking cups, and said to them,

"Drink wine!"

But they said,

"We will drink no wine; for Jonadab, the son of Rechab, our ancestor,

laid a charge upon us, saying, 'You shall drink no wine, neither you nor your sons forever; and you shall build no house, nor sow seed, nor plant or own a vineyard, but shall live in tents all your days, so that you may live long in the land where you pass your days.' And we have obeyed in every respect the charge which Jonadab, the son of Rechab, our ancestor, laid upon us, drinking no wine all our lives—neither we, nor our wives, nor our sons, nor our daughters—building no houses to live in, nor owning vineyard, field, or seed, but living in tents, acting in obedience to all the charge which Jonadab our ancestor laid upon us. It was only when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded the land that we said, 'Come and let us go up to Jerusalem before the advance of the Chaldean and Syrian armies'; and so we are living in Jerusalem."

Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying,

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Go and say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will you not learn the lesson of obedience to my words?' is the oracle of the LORD. 'The charge which Jonadab, the son of Rechab, laid upon his sons, to drink no wine, has been observed; and in obedience to their ancestor's charge they have drunk no wine to this day. But though I spoke to you early and late, you have not listened to me; and though I sent all my servants the prophets to you early and late, saying, "Turn, I pray you, each from his evil way, and amend your doings, and do not run after other gods, to serve them, that you may live in the land which I gave to you and your fathers," you have neither listened nor inclined your ears to me. Therefore, because the sons of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, have observed the charge which their father laid upon them, while this people has not listened to me, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil which I pronounced against them, because I spoke to them, but they did not listen, and I called to them, but they did not answer.' "

But to the household of the Rechabites, Jeremiah said,

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Because you have been obedient to the charge of Jonadab your ancestor, and have kept all his instructions, and have done just as he charged you, thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab, the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand in my presence forever' " [35:1-19].

Out of all this turmoil and despair Jeremiah was, however, gaining a new conception of God. This people

with whom the Lord had made his covenant, and to whom he had been faithful through the centuries, was now beginning to scatter. Their days as a nation were numbered. Will God's covenant with them be broken by him, as well as by the people? How can he longer deal with them as a nation? To the prophet this was a distressing question that could not be dismissed. Notwithstanding its insistence, he continued his efforts to hold King Zedekiah faithful to Babylon and thus quiet the nation's fears. As he continued in the line of his self-appointed duty a new feeling about God came to comfort him. A new and unbreakable covenant would be made not with the nation but with individuals. It would be graven in the hearts of men, for he maintained, "There is nothing too hard for God."

"Behold, days are coming," is the oracle of the LORD, "when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of men and with the seed of cattle; and as once I watched over them to root up and to pull down, to wreck, to ruin, and to harm, so will I watch over them to build and to plant," is the oracle of the LORD. "In those days shall they say no more,

'The fathers have eaten sour grapes,
And the children's teeth are set on edge';

but everyone shall die for his own guilt—everyone who eats the sour grapes shall have his own teeth set on edge.

"Behold, days are coming," is the oracle of the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt—that covenant of mine which they broke, so that I had to reject them—but this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," is the oracle of the LORD: "I will put my law within them, and will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every one his neighbor, and every one his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD'; for all of them shall know me, from

the least of them to the greatest of them," is the oracle of the LORD; "for I will pardon their guilt, and their sin will I remember no more" [31:27-34].

Jeremiah's last interview with King Zedekiah, a secret meeting, is interesting.

Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet, and received him at the third entrance to the house of the LORD; and the king said to Jeremiah,

"I am going to ask you a question, and you must conceal nothing from me."

Jeremiah said to Zedekiah,

"If I tell you the truth, are you not sure to put me to death? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me."

So King Zedekiah swore an oath in secret to Jeremiah, saying,

"As the LORD lives, who made this life of ours, I will neither put you to death, nor hand you over to these men who are seeking your life."

Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah,

"Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'If you but surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned; both yourself and your household shall be spared. But if you do not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city shall be handed over to the Chaldeans, who shall burn it; and you yourself shall not escape from their hand.'"

Then King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah,

"I am afraid of the Jews who have gone over to the Chaldeans, lest I be handed over to them, and they subject me to indignity."

But Jeremiah said,

"You shall not be handed over. Pray, then, listen to the voice of the LORD, as I declare it to you, that your life may be spared, and all may be well with you. But if you refuse to surrender, this is the word that the LORD has revealed to me: all the women who are left in the palace of the king of Judah shall be led out to the officers of the king of Babylon, saying,

'Your bosom friends have deceived you, and have overreached you;

They have sunk your feet in the mire, and have turned away from you.'

All your wives and children shall be led out to the Chaldeans, while you yourself shall not escape from their hand, but shall be captured by the king of Babylon; and this city shall be burned.”

Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah,

“Let no one know of this conversation, on pain of death. And if the princes hear that I have been talking with you, and come and say to you, ‘Pray, tell us what you said to the king, and what the king said to you; conceal nothing from us, on pain of death,’ you shall say to them, ‘I was presenting my petition to the king, that he would not send me back to Jonathan’s house, to die there.’”

So when all the princes came to Jeremiah, and questioned him, he answered them in accordance with all these instructions that the king had given; and they pressed him no further, for the conversation had not been overheard. Jeremiah then remained in the guard-court till the day that Jerusalem was taken [38:14-28].

At last, however, notwithstanding the efforts of Jeremiah and many citizens of Jerusalem, the silly king was detected in treasonable negotiations with Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar came swiftly, and following a siege of a year and a half the city was completely destroyed; even the temple was laid in ruins. This time only a few people were left to take care of the land—people who did not seem to be worth having in Babylon. Jeremiah was given his choice. His efforts to keep his people loyal were deemed worthy of recognition. He might go to Babylon and find a welcome there not as a prisoner but as a free citizen, A deported king of Judah was already there, and Zedekiah, now blinded, would be among the exiles. All his best fellow-citizens had been in Babylon for years. His ministry to his people could be continued favorably there. The invitation was tempting, but Jeremiah chose to remain with the pitiful remnant in the homeland.

Nebuchadnezzar appointed a governor over the little colony left behind, and it made a brave struggle to preserve itself. But in a few years such a possibility was found

impracticable, and they abandoned the attempt and went down to Egypt, leaving their wrecked city behind and, as many of them supposed, their God. One of the last pictures we have is that of Jeremiah in Egypt entreating his fellow-Jews to abandon the worship of Egyptian idols. But how could he expect them to ignore the gods of the land which was harboring them? The question was, where was their God? Was he in deserted Palestine, or with his people in Egypt or in Babylonia? That was the problem which had to be worked out in the immediate future, and its solution would change the history of Hebrew thought. To the day of his death, however, Jeremiah stood by the doctrine that religion and morality are inseparable and must ever stand together.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

We have found in the main that the Book of Jeremiah shows the confusion of unskilful and inadequate collecting. The material is ample but not chronological. However, within the chapters themselves we find allusions which help us to date them. The biographical data are also much more plentiful than in earlier books, so that we continually see the suffering, struggling man wrestling with the indifferent and self-confident leaders, both political and religious, at particular moments and in particular places. And we feel his spiritual problem. God will keep his promises, but how will it be possible?

Is there incentive to us in our own national struggle for democracy? Can we succeed? The covenant of freedom and responsibility must be written in the heart of each member of the nation. Is that our goal? Where are the Jeremiahs who will drive that home and increase our efforts to obtain a more universal and intelligent freedom rather than one controlled by a few?

But why moralize over this old saint and martyr! He is too modern for us to fail to understand him. Let us read and think about him, picturing him again and again, yielding to what stirrings of emotion come to us.

So far as the drift of prophecy is concerned we have a new situation. The Holy City is no more; the temple is gone; the people are scattered. The whole scaffolding for their current theology, which centered about a God attached to the land and the temple, has been swept away. The future must mean either the death of the religion of Israel or a long step forward. But the bedrock was left—namely, the satisfactions of the moral life. In some way future prophets must work that into new religious doctrine which can find expression in conduct and worship. Perhaps it had already been done in the individual experiences of some.

Jeremiah faced a seemingly impossible situation. While he exalted and urged his people to be faithful to their foreign alliance, he continually denounced the worship of the gods of their allies. He was making demands that could not be met by poor human beings with only a national and localized God. The miracle is that he saw, before he died, that geographical nationalism in religion could not stand, and yet he kept his faith in God, leaving a new scaffold upon which later prophets could build.

One becomes so absorbed in the story of Jeremiah that he forgets the fact that he is trying to discover ways of using the Bible in religious education. But, recalling the very extensive use of biography in education today, the story of Jeremiah makes a strong appeal to those who are seeking to use religious material. We have a more detailed life of this than of any other prophet. A little lad in a class taught by the author listened breathlessly on two successive Sundays to stories from Jeremiah which were intended to help the

children to appreciate him as a man. At the end of the second hour he raised up his leaning figure with a great sigh and said, "Oh, I just love Jeremiah!" That is the answer to the question as to whether there can be religious value in such a book as this. The ideals of youth grow on the basis of the characters which command their admiration, and still more so on those that they come to love. A period of a few weeks may easily be devoted to a continued story of Jeremiah, with a sketch of the history and the movement of the nations as one goes along, picturing Jeremiah in certain situations, delivering certain specific addresses. There will thus emerge the figure of a man, devoted to the service of God in a period when such service meant disregard of his messages, persecution, constant danger, and even periods of doubt of his own ability, yet steadfast even to his death. His message was vindicated in the disasters which came to his country, but which brought to him no satisfaction as the fulfilment of his own words, but rather a distress and sorrow exceeding that of his fellow-citizens, for to him they were themselves to blame.

If it is desirable to present Jeremiah in a shorter period, the following selections will give a very rapid survey of his life, which can be used for one brief presentation: chapters 1, 7, 11, 14, 18, 19, 21, 26, 27, 28, 31, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, and 40. Such a story must be very carefully constructed. A better way is to give a portion of the story on one occasion, making it introductory to a particular episode such as the contest with the court prophets and the symbolic breaking of the yoke—very picturesque and illustrating the way prophets worked. Perhaps this may be followed by a second story of the sermon in the temple, when the Rechabites were brought in—also a picturesque and impressive story.

There are opportunities for dramatization in stories from

the life of Jeremiah. These will suggest themselves. Tragedy so largely preponderates that young people rather than boys and girls will be likely to select for dramatization from this book.

The close relation which must exist between religion and social and political action may be impressed by setting pupils to seeking for men who might be called prophets in the history of their own country, and even in our own day. To cultivate an admiration and respect for men who undertake conscientiously to change the thought or the conditions of their times is a valuable service to growing boys and girls. It fosters a sense of responsibility and thoughtful consideration of current problems.

CHAPTER XIII

PROPHETIC EXECRATIONS AND PROBLEMS

THE BOOK OF NAHUM; THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

THE events of the period through which we have found Isaiah and Jeremiah active were of such major importance that they could not fail to arouse the spirit and to excite to independent action others of the prophetic group. We have seen how each king had his court prophets who tended to give to him favorable messages from God. Their jobs depended upon that. But there were undoubtedly many sincere men who felt called upon to "speak for God," who sympathized more deeply with Jeremiah's point of view than with these official groups. We catch glimpses of a few of these honest souls who added their efforts to those of the greater prophets, to effect the salvation of Jerusalem or to denounce her oppressors. We must not forget also the activity of those religious leaders who had, a few decades before, promulgated the new law-book, Deuteronomy. Their literary work continued, and they probably revised and re-wrote the history of the past, saturating it with their spirit. Perhaps out of this period the framework in which the stories of the Book of Judges were inserted had its origin, and the books of Kings became permeated with this same religious attitude. Some lesser men, minor prophets, as we call them, have left us a few speeches. We can make only brief mention of most of them.

The destruction of the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, was doubtless the occasion for many passionate outbursts. One

of them is contained in the Book of Nahum. Careful study of it has suggested that it is not a unit but a collection of fragments, but it reads sufficiently smoothly to give us the spirit of an individual. And what a spirit! It represents a vengeful God singing a gloating paean of joy over the fallen enemy. But back of the exultant stanzas is a sense of justice. Nineveh had misused her power, which was given her by God. Her present distress and anguish are the reward of her own tyranny and ruthlessness. Bitter and scathing in spirit, this poet has no constructive religious message for us. But we should read the text as great poetry and in order that we may sense the bitterness of the feeling of many Hebrews at this time.

Curiously enough, it was from this book that a considerable number of deeply religious people quoted during the World War of 1914-18. They sought to connect the war with "the last days and the destruction of the world." This was the consequence of their mistaken belief that the great war must be in fulfilment of ancient prophecy. Nahum, however, was concerned only with those events in the midst of which he lived. His message reflected his interpretation of God and his operations in those times.

Woe to the city, bloody throughout,
Full of lies and booty!
Prey ceases not.
The crack of the whip, and the noise of the rumbling
wheel,
And the galloping horse, and the jolting chariot;
The charging horseman, and the flashing sword,
And the glittering spear, and a multitude of slain,
And a mass of bodies, and no end to the corpses!
They stumble over the corpses!
Because of the many harlotries of a harlot
Of goodly favor and a mistress of spells,
Who sells nations by her harlotries,
And clans by her spells.

"Behold, I am against you,"
 Is the oracle of the LORD of hosts,
 "And I will strip off your skirts to your face,
 And I will show nations your nakedness,
 And kingdoms your shame.
 And I will throw vile things at you,
 And treat you with contempt, and make you
 a horror;
 So that everyone that sees you will flee from you,
 Saying, 'Nineveh is destroyed;
 Who will mourn for her?
 Whence can I seek comforters for her?'

"Are you any better than Thebes,
 That sat by the great Nile,
 With water all around her,
 Whose rampart was the sea,
 Whose wall was water?
 Ethiopia was her strength, and Egypt,
 And there was no end to it:
 Put and the Libyans were her help;
 Yet even she became an exile;
 She went into captivity;
 Even her children were dashed in pieces
 At the head of every street;
 And upon her honored ones they cast lots,
 And all her great men were bound in chains.

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"Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria;
 your nobles sleep!
 Your people are scattered upon the hilltops,
 with none to gather them.
 There is no healing for your wound;
 your hurt is incurable.
 Everyone who shall hear the news about you,
 will clap his hands over you.
 For against whom has not your malice
 continually gone forth?" [3:1-10, 18, 19].

The Scythian invasion, which first impelled Jeremiah to speak, provoked also the speeches of Zephaniah. His de-

nunciations, however, are of Jerusalem and her heedless rich. She is staggering to a fall, in company with all the surrounding peoples, under the onslaught of the Scythians. Zephaniah first pronounces a day of doom upon the world (1:2-6). Then he describes this day of the Lord as one of the utmost disaster. The people wailing, the walls crushed, the Lord searching Jerusalem with lamps, seeking out those that live in luxury, desolating their houses and their vineyards (1:7-18). "A day of wrath is that day; a day of trouble and distress; a day of desolation and waste; a day of cloud and thundercloud; a day of the trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and the lofty battlements." In this terrible destruction he includes Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, and Assyria, because they have derided the inhabitants of Judah and taunted them in their trouble.

It is likely that messages of Zephaniah and men like him were more acceptable to the people than those of Jeremiah. The inclusion in the coming destruction of all the enemies of the Hebrew people tempers their message, even though it included the tragic announcement of Judah's own fall. For other nations there was to be no redemption, but for Jerusalem a triumphant restoration of the city; discipline for Judah, but destruction for the rest of the world. In the last chapter we have a later hand seeking to mitigate the message by promises of a marvelous restoration characteristic of later thought.

The Book of Obadiah, containing only one chapter, is devoted to cursing the land of Edom on the eastern border because its people did not come to the rescue of the Hebrews.

On the day when you stood by,
While aliens carried off his gods,
And foreigners entered his gates,
And cast lots upon Jerusalem,
You, too, were as one of them.

We must bear in mind that to be an enemy of the Hebrews was to be an enemy of God, as they believed.

Before leaving this group of small books, we may consider one more, Habakkuk, containing three chapters. It is interesting to us who are seeking to get the panorama of life back of the Bible, through which our religion grew, to notice that this book indicates that even prophets were troubled by religious problems. Once upon a time it had seemed a simple matter to the prophets to understand the "way of the Lord." History was his action on behalf of his people. Eventually they would be rewarded. Their disasters were but the result of their own neglect of him. What he did could not be questioned. Refusal to conform to his moral ideals was leading to the destruction of the nation. So they would assent.

But the fact remained that there were many people then living who had continued to honor their God. The destruction which was about to come upon the city affected not only those that had scorned him but those that had been faithful. Why should the faithful and the faithless suffer together and how could the promises of God be fulfilled—promises of destruction of enemies as well as rewards for faithful Israel?

Habakkuk was a prophet whose thought was doubtless echoed in the hearts of many. He had grown up in the belief that, as Jeremiah and Isaiah had said, the Assyrians and afterward the Chaldeans or Babylonians were instruments in the hands of God for disciplining his people. He was now deeply troubled by a question: "How long is this thing going to last?" He is willing to grant that God is raising up the Babylonians; he vividly pictures the dreadful destruction that they bring. He even admits that God has made them for the punishment of his people, but, he says, "they are wicked, too. What is going to happen to *them*?" How long

is God going to allow them to exist?" The prayer of Habakkuk comes as the result of his thinking. He outlines the situation as it appears to him (1:2-17). Apparently, he has no immediate answer to his prayer. He waits and is told to write upon tablets so that he may see a vision of the future (2:1-3). The answer comes, "Verily, the wicked man—I take no pleasure in him; but the righteous lives by reason of his faithfulness" (vs. 4). This thought is expanded in the remainder of the chapter. Then follows (chap. 3) a picture which places Jehovah above the nations of the earth, but yet does not answer the prophet's question, "How long, O Lord?" The closing stanzas are very personal. They mournfully record the spiritual distress of the prophet. But he refuses to turn away from God. "I will rejoice in my victorious God," he says. "God is my strength," and with him I "walk upon my heights."

I have heard and my body trembles;
My lips quiver at the sound.
Decay enters my bones,
And my steps totter beneath me.
I will wait for the day of trouble
To come upon the people that oppresses us.

Though the fig tree do not flourish,
And there be no fruit on the vines;
Though the product of the olive fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock be cut off from the fold,
And there be no cattle in the stalls;
Yet will I exult in the LORD;
I will rejoice in my victorious God!
God, the Lord, is my strength;
And he makes my feet like the feet of hinds,
And makes me walk upon my heights [3:16-19].¹

¹ The later use of this in worship, as a psalm, is indicated by the instructions to musicians: "For the director. On my stringed instruments."

In this prophet we find reason working upon faith. Heretofore the prophets had conceived of the message of God in the terms of an immediate necessity and had not swerved from their belief that the disasters of the people of Israel were but temporary punishment. Prosperity and power would surely return in greater measure than ever before. The methods of God could not be questioned. His purpose was simple and sure.

Perhaps this prophet helps us to realize that to question our own faith, or our ideals of God, or doctrines which we inherited, may be a sign of growth, just as Habakkuk had grown beyond the automatic acceptance of the doctrines of his predecessors. He was for the moment a conscientious doubter, but of one thing he was sure. God was in human history, and some day he would be able to see it clearly.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

While these minor voices give us no outstanding picture of personalities, we gain from them glimpses of the prophets as a group. We learn to visualize them as spokesmen of their times. Shall we call them conservative or progressive? What were they holding to that was outworn? What were they apprehending that was new and a sign of spiritual growth? Can we see, through them, how slowly inspiration sometimes works? Do we come to realize that an inspired life is much more uncertain in its action than an automatically inspired pen might be, and yet much more worthy of a creative God? Inspired history may be fraught with the uncertainties of the individuals who make it, but it moves on toward some ideal goal. Sometimes it goes forward by leaps and bounds, and again it lags and seems almost to fall backward. But always there must be a spokesman.

For ourselves every Hebrew prophet has the power to stir our thought one way or another. But this particular group of minor prophets gives us little or no help in the religious education of youth, except perhaps Habakkuk with his questioning mind.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PROPHET WHO CHANGED HIS MESSAGE

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

THE Book of Ezekiel, which we shall now explore, has given rise in past centuries to many fantastic ideas. As a matter of fact, it is not fantastic when we understand the man whose thought and action it so vividly portrays. Ezekiel belonged to the priestly family of Zadok, of the order of priests ministering at the temple at Jerusalem in a period after the great reformation of Josiah, in which the temple had suddenly assumed greatly increased significance.

We recall how Josiah swept through the land with his military forces, throwing down all the ancient sanctuaries on the hilltops and destroying all traces of idolatry, carrying out the decrees of the new-found lawbook which required that only in Jerusalem and at the temple should sacrifice be made. It is hardly to be believed that this reform was really quite as thorough as pictured by the writer of the books of Kings. At all events, as we have seen in our study of Jeremiah, it was followed by a relapse into the recognition of many other gods, according to the fears and fancies of different people. It is not likely that worship of God was abandoned, but it took its place with such gods of other nations as seemed to promise most at the time.

In such an atmosphere the young Ezekiel had observed, or perhaps performed, a ministry in the temple. A devotee of God alone, he doubtless found himself more and more in the minority as the shadows of approaching disaster closed

in about Jerusalem. We cannot refrain from wondering if he personally knew Jeremiah and if they had talked together. And what were his experiences and those of his fellow-countrymen during that long trek from Jerusalem to Babylon which he and they took as captives of war, a thousand miles or more? How long were they on the road? Of these events we have no annals.

We became acquainted with Ezekiel in Babylon¹ in the midst of the captives—that “ten thousand of the best inhabitants of the land” which constituted this first deportation. The Hebrew people were settled, according to the story, in a fertile valley along the banks of the river Chebar. It was not the custom of Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the peoples whom he conquered, but simply to break up their national life. He followed his usual custom in giving the Hebrews a section of the country with liberty to develop their own homes, industries, and activities. He imprisoned only high officials.

The members of this large group could hardly have been of one mind politically or religiously. Some might take the “I told you so” attitude, some recognized an enlargement of opportunity, but many despaired—God, temple, Holy City, far away. What could be left? Doubtless families and social groups were divided in their attitudes, members of them having different views regarding recent events. One pictures a period of confusion, months or years, while the people were becoming settled or productive.

The temple was not there but in Jerusalem, for that was God’s dwelling-place. He would not move out with the captives, for both temple and city were still intact. What

¹ Some scholars venture to think that Ezekiel preached in Jerusalem. There is not complete agreement of opinion, but we take here the view most commonly held, which seems to make the book highly intelligible.

would become of other religious customs which worshipers of God had observed in Jerusalem? Probably those that had served other gods at home quite easily adopted the worship of the gods of Babylonia, which were many. Apparently, the Lord had been vanquished. He was not strong enough to protect his people from the loss of their country. The gods of Babylonia were surely stronger; so they might argue. And again, how can we worship our Lord even if we would at this long distance? He is far away in the temple at Jerusalem. Small wonder that they felt that no sacrifices could be offered to God in Babylon. They would have seemed inconsistent.²

It is interesting to read here a psalm which is apparently a poem written out of the hearts of some of those Jews who longed to worship their own God but felt it impossible, for he had been completely localized in Palestine. From time to time he had been represented as having power over other nations in their relations with Palestine, but his power had been unequal to the great emergency. What could such a God do for these thousands of his people in a distant foreign land, even if he were not completely estranged?

By the rivers of Babylon,
 There we sat down, and wept,
 When we remembered Zion.
 Upon the poplars, in the midst of her,
 We hung up our harps.
 For there our captors
 Demanded of us songs,
 And our tormentors, mirth:
 "Sing us some of the songs of Zion."

² Ezra 8:17 indicates that a temple was eventually built at Casiphia in Babylonia, but it could never have had a significance such as the original temple in Jerusalem. The period of the Exile was long and, as we shall see, admitted of great changes in views of God.

How could we sing the songs of the LORD
In a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
May my right hand fail me!
May my tongue cleave to my palate,
If I do not remember you;
If I set not Jerusalem
Above my highest joy!

Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites,
The day of Jerusalem!
They who said, "Raze it, raze it,
To its very foundations!"
O daughter of Babylon, destructive one,
Blessed be he who requites to you
The treatment that you dealt out to us!
Blessed be he who seizes your little ones,
And dashes them to pieces upon a rock!
[Psalm 137].

Recall that the prophet Jeremiah, in a letter to the exiles which we have already noted, urged them to settle down in Babylon, build houses, marry, and bring up their children in the expectation of a long sojourn there. Even he says to them that *after the period of their exile is passed* God will let himself be "found of them" (Jer. 29:1-14).

We must recall that Ezekiel was a priest and of a priestly family, and he was necessarily, in Babylon, a priest without a job. We shall surmise that for several years after reaching Babylon he was depressed and in spiritual turmoil. All his theories about God were called into question. How could he continue his function as a priest? He had become convinced by recent events that Nebuchadnezzar would eventually destroy Jerusalem, for rumors of his distrust of those who had been left there had doubtless circulated. Involved in the destruction of Jerusalem would be the destruction of the temple. How would God survive? But Ezekiel, a deep-

ly religious soul, must eventually sense the fact that religion was the only bond which would hold the Hebrews together and prepare them for a return to their own land. Of such an outcome he was certain, for he could not but believe that his people would yet become powerful and an honor to their God. In this expectancy and the training of his people for such a future, Ezekiel saw his task.

Ezekiel was a mystic. His several years of religious meditation upon the past, present, and future, without accustomed religious activity, had doubtless increased his natural tendencies. We save ourselves much useless quest if we recognize at the beginning the element of ecstasy and trance in his prophetic activity. At this juncture in his life he tells us that he had a vision that God appeared to him *in Babylon*. Can we realize the significance of that to a people who believed that God appeared only in the temple in Jerusalem? The vision which he describes is one of power and glory beside which the simple vision which Isaiah experienced in the temple was insignificant. It was a marvelous combination of power, represented by enormous winged creatures, belonging neither to the human nor to the animal world, but created for this special appearance. The whole appears in the midst of fire, wheels, color, wings, heads, motion—an undecipherable creation calculated to awe, mystify, and terrify any human being who looked upon it. Such a vision needed no temple for its appearance, for “only the vast Babylonian sky would be sufficient covering for it.” But out of its midst there came a voice, the voice of God speaking to the prostrate prophet.

And he said to me,

“O mortal man, stand upon your feet, that I may speak with you!”

As he spoke to me, a spirit entered me, and set me upon my feet. And I heard him that spoke to me saying,

“O mortal man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, that nation

of rebels who have rebelled against me—they and their fathers have sinned against me to this very day, the children also are hard-faced and stubborn—I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God!’ And whether they listen or decline to listen—for they are a rebellious house—they shall know that there is a prophet among them. And you, O mortal man, fear them not, nor be dismayed at them; even when thistles and thorns are round about you, and you dwell among scorpions, fear not their words, nor be dismayed at their looks—for they are a rebellious house. You shall speak what I say to them whether they listen or decline to listen—for they are a rebellious house. And you, O mortal man, hear what I say to you; be not rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I give you!” [2:1-8].

A great deal of time has been wasted by individuals in trying to picture clearly this vision. It is not intended to be clear. It was not clear to Ezekiel. It was simply overpowering, above and beyond everything which he could possibly have conceived. It meant, first of all, the presence of God, then power, majesty, holiness, and fidelity, and it demanded obedience. His wakened spirit sensed in it a commission to him, compelling him to speak to his fellow-captives and to continue speaking to them even when they refused to listen. Moreover, his message must become part of himself, for he is handed a scroll inscribed with “lamentations, mourning, and woe.” The scroll is to be eaten and digested, a terrible figure suggesting the way in which he must dwell upon the sins of the people before he can undertake to speak to them. He must become fired with a great purpose, and, like Jeremiah, God would make him adamant, able to bear the ridicule and denunciations which would be heaped upon him.

Then I looked, and lo! there was a hand stretched out to me; and lo! there was in it a scroll. And he unrolled it before me; and it was covered with writing on both sides—words of lamentation, mourning, and woe were written on it. Then he said to me,

“O mortal men, eat what you find here; eat this scroll, then go and speak to the house of Israel!”

So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat, saying to me.

"O mortal man, eat and digest this scroll which I am giving you!"

And when I ate the scroll, it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. Then he said to me,

"O mortal man, go to the house of Israel, and speak what I say to them. For it is not to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language that you are sent, but to the house of Israel—not to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand, If I sent you to them, they would certainly listen to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you; for they will not listen to me; for the whole house of Israel is hard-faced and stubborn. But I will make you as hard-faced and stubborn as they; I will make you like adamant, harder than flint. Fear them not, nor be dismayed before them—for they are a rebellious house."

He said further to me,

"O mortal man, all the words that I shall speak to you receive and attend to. Then go to the exiles, your fellow-countrymen, and speak to them, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD!' whether they hear or decline to hear."

Then a spirit lifted me up (and as the glory of the LORD rose from its place, I heard behind me the sound of a great rustling; it was the sound of the wings of the creatures as they touched one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, that caused the great rustling), a spirit lifted me up and carried me away, and I went with my spirit in a fierce glow—the hand of the LORD pressing hard upon me—and came to the exiles who lived at Tel-abib, by the River Chebar, and stayed with them there for seven days in a state of stupor [2:9—3:15].

From this vision he went to the exiles with his spirit in a "fierce glow" and "the hand of the Lord pressing hard upon" him. After a week his commission is confirmed. He is assured that upon him is the responsibility for warning wicked man, and if, lacking such warning, man dies in sin, his blood will be required of Ezekiel's hand. The commission is followed by a period of dumbness as a sign of the genuineness of his vision.

At the end of seven days the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

"O mortal man, I appoint you a watchman to the house of Israel; and

whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall warn them from me. If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you fail to warn him—if you say nothing to warn the wicked man from his wicked way, in order to save his life—he being wicked shall die for his iniquity, but his blood will I require at your hand. If, however, you warn the wicked man, and he turn not from his wicked conduct and his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have saved yourself. Or if a righteous man turn from his righteousness, and do what is wrong, and I make that the occasion for bringing about his downfall, he shall die; because you did not warn him, he shall die for his sin, and the righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood will I require at your hand. If, however, you warn the righteous man not to sin, and he do not sin, he shall live, because he took warning; and you will have saved yourself" [3:16-21].

Now what was this message that Ezekiel was expected to give to the people? It was his conviction, reached after years of observation and, as he believed, special revelation, that Jerusalem, their holy city, was soon to fall. It could not be saved. The doom was brought upon it by God himself because of its continued utter corruption. The chapters which follow are full of picturesque acts, intended to demonstrate dramatically to Ezekiel's countrymen, whose attention could be thus arrested, the coming fate of Jerusalem. Destruction of that city and the temple was the one thing which they could not accept, for what would become of God if he had no temple to dwell in and no people to serve him in Jerusalem.

The prophet pictures God as against Jerusalem and utterly without pity for its people. No sign of repentance of those remaining in Jerusalem is likely to be seen. Perhaps the terrible picture of idolatry and desecration of the temple is drawn from memory rather than from immediate news. But remember that Ezekiel's position as a member of a priestly family had given him ample opportunities to ob-

serve not only the apostasies of the people but their temper of mind. He had no hope of a change of heart.

He relates a vision in which he was taken up by God and brought to Jerusalem into the very temple itself. He notes the abominations that are there carried on, all characteristic of some form of idolatry, and his soul is filled with loathing (chap. 8). He tells us that one commissioned by God went through the city trying to find and to mark any who were faithful to him. He was accompanied by armed officers of the law under the command that all the unfaithful should be slain on sight (9:1-11). Even in a vision the prophet could not believe that the faithful must perish with the unfaithful. We are not told the result of this celestial canvass of the city, but it was such that God could no longer remain there, and in a continuation of the vision we see him departing from the temple. He rises in the midst of clouds, cherubs, radiance, more wheels and wings—the same sort of inexplicable vision of majesty and power as that which accompanied Ezekiel's call. The picture is completed by the glory of the Lord rising from the midst of the vision and locating itself upon the mountains east of the city. Now, since God had *departed* from the temple, there was no obstacle to its destruction (chap. 10).

Then the cherubim lifted their wings—the wheels remaining beside them, and the glory of the LORD resting above them—and the glory of the LORD rose from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain east of the city. And the spirit lifted me up, and brought me in visions of God back to the exiles in Chaldea. So the vision that I had seen passed from me. Then I told the exiles all that the LORD had shown me [11:22-25].

To the exiles, Ezekiel relates this vision and by other pictorial acts continually tries to convince them that Jerusalem is surely about to be destroyed. The people simply could

not believe him. Their whole theology was against it. Gods were local. They did not leave their countries. They must be worshiped on their own land. They would never allow themselves to be left without worshippers. Therefore, Jerusalem could not be destroyed. Had not earlier prophets of God told them that?

In vain Ezekiel preaches sermon after sermon to the "rebellious house," as he calls Jerusalem, using threat, allegory, and symbol, but to no apparent avail. The worthless vine, the faithless wife, the rusty pot, are examples (chaps. 15, 16, 24). Even the death of the prophet's wife is turned into a symbol (24:15-27).

We must not think of the prophet as in a class quite by himself, and all the Jews at the other extreme. There were doubtless many who felt as Ezekiel did, and who could even believe that their God had the will and the power to speak to them in that distant land. But they were in the minority.

Meantime, history moved on, and Nebuchadnezzar, having no confidence in the loyalty of the Jewish king, whom he had left upon the throne, marched upon Jerusalem and completed the destruction which had been threatened and partially accomplished ten years before. This time, as we recall, he took to Babylon all the inhabitants of the city, save only a little group among whom Jeremiah elected to stay, under the governorship of Gedaliah.

Just how the news of the terrible disaster reached Babylon, we do not know. The destruction of the distant city of Jerusalem was not so important in the passing events of the Babylonian empire as many other conquests that were taking place. It was just the punishment of one more recalcitrant city, and the removal of trouble-makers on the path between Babylon and Egypt. But to the captive Jews it was the end of everything. Land gone, temple gone, God gone.

But God could not be destroyed. Where was he? Soon the thoughtful would raise the question, and Ezekiel must answer.

The newly arrived company of deported Hebrews probably adjusted itself quickly to life in the Babylonian colony, where many were reunited with friends and possibly old neighbors. They were not of so high a caliber as those who had come at first. They had been unresponsive to Jeremiah's warning and had little use for prophets. They felt that God had shown himself to be powerless to save, or at least indifferent to, his own city and his own temple.

There were some deeply religious souls among the Hebrews in Babylon, however, who had never forsaken God in their hearts, and as best they could, under the guidance of Ezekiel and possibly others associated with him, they had held together as a religious group. Perhaps God would yet allow them to return to Jerusalem. At least they could not forget him and turn to other gods. It is difficult for us to realize the distress of this group when the news of the actual fall of Jerusalem and the desecration and destruction of the temple reached Babylon. In this period of despair, Ezekiel arrived at a new theme for his preaching. The worst had happened. But there *must* be a future for the people of Israel.

There are some interesting chapters which indicate a change of tone in Ezekiel's preaching at this time. God now appears in his thought as a shepherd, kindly and protecting.

"For thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, here am I, and I will seek and search for my flock. As a shepherd searches for his flock on a day of whirlwind, when his sheep are scattered, so will I search for my flock, and rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on the day of clouds and thick darkness. I will lead them out of the nations, and gather them from the lands; and I will bring them to their own country,

and tend them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys, and in all the best places of the land. In good pasture will I tend them, and on the high mountains of Israel shall be their fold; there shall they lie down in a good fold, and on rich pasture shall they graze on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my flock, and I myself will lead them to their pasture,' is the oracle of the Lord God. 'I will seek out the lost, I will bring back the strayed, I will bind up the wounded, I will strengthen the sick; and I will watch over the fat and strong ones, tending them rightly.'

“And I will set up one shepherd over them, to tend them, even my servant David, who shall tend them, and be a shepherd to them. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them—I the LORD have spoken it. I will make with them a covenant of peace, and I will remove wild beasts out of the land, so that they may live securely in the steppes, and sleep in the woods. And I will bless them round about my hill, and will send down the showers in their season—showers of blessing shall they be. Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield her produce; they shall live securely on their land; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them. And they shall no longer be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the earth devour them; but they shall live securely, with none to make them afraid. I will provide for them a soil renowned for fruitfulness, and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer bear the reproach of the nations. Thus they shall know that I, the LORD, am their God, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people,' is the oracle of the Lord God. 'And you my flock are the flock of my pasture, and I the LORD am your God,' is the oracle of the Lord God” [34:11-16, 23-31].

He brings life to a valley of dry bones, the dead nation.

The hand of the LORD was upon me; and the LORD carried me out by the spirit, and set me down in the midst of a valley which was full of bones. He led me all round them, and lo! there were very many of them on the surface of the valley, and lo! they were very dry. Then he said to me,

“O mortal man, can these bones live?”

And I answered,

“O Lord God, thou knowest.”

Then he said to me,

"Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I am causing breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will put sinews upon you, and will clothe you with flesh, and cover you with skin; then I will put breath into you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.' "

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a sound; and lo! there followed a rustling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And as I looked, lo! there were sinews upon them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me,

"Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, O mortal man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain men, that they may live!' "

So I prophesied as he had commanded me; and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet—an exceedingly great host. Then he said to me,

"O mortal man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they keep saying, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are completely cut off.' Therefore prophecy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am opening your graves, and will raise you out of your graves, O my people, and will bring you into the land of Israel. And when I open your graves, and raise you out of your graves, O my people, you shall know that I am the LORD. Then I will put my spirit into you, and you shall live; and I will settle you on your own land; and you shall know that I am the LORD. I have spoken it, and I will do it,' is the oracle of the LORD" [37:1-14].

Ezekiel himself is quite unable to conceive of God without a people, and, equally, a people without God. He reasons that, in justification of his own holiness, the Lord must remain faithful, notwithstanding the unfaithfulness of his people. There must come, for the vindication of his own name, restoration and a new start. He no longer dwells upon the wickedness of the people but rather upon the greatness of God. In the degradation of the inhabitants of

Jerusalem, God himself has been degraded. That could not continue.

Recall that the Hebrews had been in Babylon only about ten years when Jerusalem was destroyed. The development of Ezekiel's thought of God and the progress of his ministry had been very rapid. No possible return to Jerusalem was as yet even upon the horizon of events. The later chapters of the book represent two phases of the prophet's thought which to him filled a chasm. The first group of oracles are directed against the foreign nations.³ Like Habakkuk, Ezekiel could not tolerate the idea that there was no punishment for those nations which had derided and destroyed Israel (chaps. 25-32). But in the remaining chapters we have speeches, the purpose of which is to build up confidence in a new theocracy—that is, a government of which God alone is the head. In it each individual was to share responsibility for the entire community. The intimate and direct relation of God to this community would mean that religion was its lifeblood.

Little by little, Ezekiel may have succeeded in building up in the hearts of some of his people confidence in a future, based upon their own faithfulness to God, and his determination to keep them for himself in a glory undimmed by the past (chaps. 33-39).

An ideal land definitely allotted becomes so clear to the prophet that it is his constant vision. We can imagine him dwelling upon it, even working it out in countless hours of meditation, hope, and observation of life, in a land far from the place where he believed that the great drama was to be enacted.

It is not necessary to go into details of the new city which

³ Some of these are doubted as belonging to Ezekiel, but there is no certain test.

he pictured, except to point out that the temple, on a great elevation separated because of its holiness from the ordinary activities of the city, was to be the ever present magnet holding the inhabitants fast to God, who would dwell there in peace, righteousness, and security, the only guardian of a righteous people.

Many people in past centuries have tried to see in this vision of Ezekiel a picture of the heavenly city. But such was not the prophet's intent. It is quite doubtful if such a city as he describes would have appealed to his people as a desirable place in which to live. But it is full of the radiance of the chastened but indomitable spirit of Ezekiel whose faith in God and his unbreakable relations to Israel was indestructible.

The vital element in Ezekiel's thought of God lay in the method by which he would retain his relationship to his people. A new covenant, written in the heart of man, was to be its basis. The bond between God and his people would be stronger than ever because it would be a relationship with the individual members of the nation rather than the organized body. Jeremiah had sensed this necessity; Ezekiel proclaims it.

"What mean you by quoting this proverb in the land of Israel:

'The fathers eat sour grapes,
And the children's teeth are set on edge'?

As I live," is the oracle of the Lord God, "you shall have no more occasion to quote this proverb in Israel. Behold, all lives are mine—the life of the son is mine equally with that of the father—the person who sins shall die.

"If a man be righteous, and do what is lawful and right . . . if he withhold his hand from crime, observe strict justice between man and man, follow my statutes, and be careful to observe my ordinances—he is righteous, and shall surely live," is the oracle of the Lord God.

"If he beget a son, a violent man, and a shedder of blood . . . that

son shall by no means live; because he commits all these abominations, he shall surely die, and his blood shall be upon his own head.

"But if this man beget a son who sees all the sins that his father has done, and is afraid, and does not act likewise . . . obeys my ordinances, and follows my statutes—that son shall not die for the iniquity of his father, but shall surely live.

He who sins shall die; the son shall not bear the consequences of the father's iniquity, nor the father bear the consequences of the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous shall be put to his own account, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be put to his.

"Or if the wicked man turn from all the sins which he has committed, and keep all my statutes, and do what is lawful and right, he shall surely live, and not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness which he has done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all in the death of the wicked?" is the oracle of the Lord God; "and not rather in this, that he turn from his way and live?"

"But if the righteous man turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, acting in accordance with all the abominations which the wicked man practices, none of the righteous deeds which he has done shall be remembered; for the treason which he has committed, and the sin which he has done, he shall die [18:1-17, 20-24].

The prophet clearly states his belief that every man will be responsible for his own conduct. No longer will the nation be held responsible for the sins of individuals, or the father for those of a son, or the son for those of a father. Collective responsibility can only be possible when individuals accept their own responsibility as units of a group. It was a hard doctrine for people who had thought in collective terms. Their remonstrance is reflected in the prophet's reply.

"Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Hear, then, O house of Israel! Is my way not fair? Is it not your ways that are not fair? If a righteous man turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, he shall die; for the iniquity which he has committed he shall die. But if a wicked man turn from the wickedness which he has committed, and do what is

lawful and right, he shall save his life; because he is afraid, and turns from all the transgressions which he has committed, he shall surely live, and not die. Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Are my ways not fair, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not fair? Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you each in accordance with his ways," is the oracle of the Lord God. "Repent, then, and turn from all your transgressions, lest your iniquity bring you to ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me; and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," is the oracle of the Lord God. "Turn, then, and live!" [18:25-32].

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCE

We have found the chapters of Ezekiel more complete and with more systematic arrangement than the work of any previous prophet. They present small details which fill in the picture. If the situation of the prophet is clearly understood, together with that of his people, we find ourselves able to comprehend, to wonder, and to enjoy. Perhaps the residence in a strange land gave to the prophet a more definite following among his people, and we therefore owe the preservation of his speeches in such excellent form to a more distinct group of disciples than those of earlier prophets.

Ezekiel has given us an opportunity to examine the phenomena of prophetic visions and to reflect upon the extent to which a prophet's temperament affected the form and content of his message. We shall recall that from the beginning the prophets had thought themselves to be under the compulsion of God. Their messages were not theirs but "the oracles of God." We recall the early prophetic ecstasies pictured in the days of Saul and of Elisha. We have noted the stern character of Amos responding to the prophetic impulse in one way, the tender heart of Hosea in another.

Isaiah's poetic majesty was the expression of a temperament vastly different from the acute sympathy of Jeremiah, and now we have in Ezekiel the mystic quality "upon which the prophetic impulse plays as upon a fine instrument producing new harmonies, only hinted at before." What is the place of mysticism in religion? Does the human soul yearn for it? Do many modern cults owe their success to this innate yearning? Ought we to give it more consideration? The mysticism of the prophets was not blind. It was shot through with common sense and moral reason.

We cannot have failed to notice with astonishment the ease with which Ezekiel changed his tone with the current of history. When nothing could be accomplished by further blasting of Jerusalem and her leaders, he becomes gentle and wise, as tender as the shepherd whom he pictures. God's covenant which could not be broken was at stake. The will of a gentle, appreciative, and reasonable God rather than a God of wrath was proclaimed. He must win his people, persuade and not command. Thus the prophet was applying his fine intellect to his religion. He had to think out a new theory of God and of life. Nationalism in religion was dead. An individualistic philosophy commanding personal responsibility, and a personal relation to God, had fully emerged as a characteristic of religion.

Suppose that at the news of the fall of Jerusalem, which was a confirmation of his worst predictions, Ezekiel had said, "Well, I am through, my task is done," how would the progress of religious thought have been delayed? He had the courage to set aside the old framework and to go on to a higher level, a more marvelous God, and the clear working-out of "the New Covenant." Thus each prophet seems to leave us with a sense of freedom to grow and to think, even as he thought, felt, and grew.

One wonders if there is something to think about in the way in which the great efforts of Ezekiel's life, dare we say, petered out into a mystical vision of an impractical city—a city the vision of which gave *him* great comfort. But might its impracticabilities impress his fellow-countrymen more than its symmetrical perfection, and would it emphasize a cult rather than a practical life?

Now what are we going to do with Ezekiel in religious education? Possibly very little, except to enrich our own appreciation of this religious history. Taken bit by bit there are only a few stories sufficiently clear to furnish a basis for what may be called a "lesson," and the story of Ezekiel is too much a story of inner experience to make a strong appeal to youth. If one were trying to observe the methods of work of the prophets, certainly any group of young people would be interested in the peculiarities of Ezekiel's devices as compared with those of Isaiah and Jeremiah. As a character in whom strong psychic qualities were combined with religion, Ezekiel's temperament would be interesting as a subject for discussion among adults and older young people.

A discussion of the part that personal responsibility plays in the community and in the church grows naturally from the study of this book.

The question whether Ezekiel saw life as it is, or only as he felt it must be, is also pertinent. *Do* children suffer for the sins of their fathers, and fathers for the sins of their children, and to what extent? Again, has society a responsibility? Does the entire religious philosophy of any prophet thus far studied completely satisfy us, or do we wait for something more?

CHAPTER XV

ONE GOD, CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE THE SUFFERING SERVANT: A GLORIOUS RETURN

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH, CHAPTERS 40-66

IN ORDER to appreciate the prophet whom we shall now consider, it is not necessary to concern ourselves with many details of the historical events leading up to the literature. We shall note, however, that Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, whose reign was the background for the work of the prophet Ezekiel, died in 562 B.C. One would have supposed that the Hebrews would have accepted their entrance into the life of Babylon as final, so far as their relation to Palestine was concerned, especially after the fall of Jerusalem. Had they thrown themselves into the larger interests of the peoples of the Tigris and Euphrates, they would have profited individually although losing their identity as a nation. But the Hebrews were, then as now, a gregarious people, physically, mentally, and spiritually. And in their new surroundings the dream of a national home and of a great destiny was increased in intensity rather than diminished.

So far as we have any record, no great single prophetic voice was heard among the Hebrews in Babylon for many years after Ezekiel; but possibly there were many minor voices that kept alive the hope of a return to Palestine. This hope would be strongest in those deeply religious souls who could never accustom themselves to the limitations of worship of God in a foreign land, if indeed they felt that they

could worship him at all. But religion often deepens and strengthens its hold in the midst of adversity, and, whatever may have been the material circumstances of those Jews who dwelt in Babylon, some, still faithful to God, would be endlessly seeking for an answer to the questions: Why are we here? Has the Lord forgotten his people? If not, what does he intend for us in the future, and how shall we learn of his intentions in this faraway land?

To return for a moment to the historical situation, we shall observe that Nebuchadnezzar's son and successor reigned but two years. He was murdered, and the throne passed to successively weaker men, their reigns ending in conspiracy and violence. Meantime the Medes in the north had taken possession of the eastern and northern provinces of the old Assyrian empire, and their king had established himself.

Cyrus, prince of Anshan, a vassal state of Media, revolted against and conquered his overlord, thus becoming ruler of the empire of the Medes and Persians. Three kings formed a defensive alliance against him: Croesus, king of the Lydians; Nabonidus, king of Babylonia; and Amasis, king of Egypt. Cyrus conquered Croesus in 546 B.C. and took practically unresisted possession of Babylon in 538 or 539. This short period of approximately fifty years since the destruction of Jerusalem must have been full of uncertainties for the Babylonians and for the many deported peoples within their territory.

We have tried to picture the philosophy of history which had taken shape in the minds of the prophets and which had been expressed through the great revival of literary activity suggested in the preceding chapter. This philosophy must have been a subject for frequent discussion. There were among the Hebrews those who believed that God con-

trolled all the nations, yet never lost sight of his own people, and those who scoffed at this notion, doubtless many more of the latter than of the former. But all of them must have been keenly apprehensive of what would happen to their people should there be a siege of Babylon and a victory for Cyrus, who was the great figure in the world of that time. History was in the making.

We have one great voice coming from the close of this period, Isaiah of Babylon, as we shall call him. He speaks to us through chapters 40 to 55 of Isaiah.¹ We know nothing about this man save that he spoke to the Hebrews through marvelous poems, smoother and more exalted than those of any of his predecessors. His theory of God and history is very definite. It may be interpreted as follows: Our God is the creator of the universe and the *only* God. He is everlasting, unsearchable, all-knowing, all-tender. This was pure monotheism, for the first time completely expressed. What will such a God do for such a people? He will blot out their sins, a necessary process. He will reassemble them and give them strength to return to Jerusalem, the city of his choice. He will gather his scattered people from many lands, not for their own sake but for a great reason—Israel is to become the servant of God in bringing knowledge of him to all the nations of the world. Her suffering has been in order that she might come to the realization of this mission. Cyrus is the agent of God, upon whom he has placed the responsibility for liberating the people of Israel in order that they may return to their land.

The prophet's great concern is—will this people measure up to such a God and accept the mission which he has placed upon them? He the prophet of God, unnamed and self-

¹ Chaps. 56–66 of this book contain a collection of short poems coming from this and later dates.

effacing, must persuade them to leave behind them the safer and more apparent glories of Babylon, in order to take the long journey back to ruined Jerusalem, where they must face many years of privation and hardship in rebuilding the city and the temple. What an undertaking! But the prophet glorifies the task and minimizes all the difficulties. The comfortable majority probably said, "Why should we go?"

It is always hard for us to understand how pioneer peoples can visualize a future sufficiently attractive to offset the terrible experiences through which they are bound to pass in seeking new homes, but there is something in such people which impels them to overcome obstacles in the interest of gains which are far, sometimes generations, ahead. The prophet urges and assures that God will go with them, guiding, comforting, sustaining. There were many who listened to this prophet. Just how many were persuaded we do not know. We call him the second Isaiah because by some ancient editor his poems have been attached to the collection of sermons of Isaiah of Jerusalem, who lived two centuries earlier.

Let us follow through some of these poems, that we may appreciate their timeliness. We wonder whether he spoke them or simply wrote and circulated them, but his particular method of propaganda is not known to us.

The psychology of the situation is clear. First, a message of comfort, coupled with a vision of one coming straight from God, crying out the good tidings that the Lord himself is on the way to Zion, and like a shepherd he will gather there his long-afflicted people.

"Comfort, O comfort my people,"
says your God;

"Speak to the heart of Jerusalem,
and call to her,

That her time of service is ended,
that her guilt is paid in full;
That she has received of the LORD's hand
double for all her sins."

Hark! one calls:

"In the wilderness clear the way of the LORD,
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Let every valley be raised up,
And every mountain and hill brought low;
Let the uneven ground become a plain,
And the rugged heights a valley.
Then shall the glory of the LORD be revealed,
And all flesh shall see it together;
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Hark! one says, "Call!"

And I said, "What shall I call?"

"All flesh is grass,
And all its beauty is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
When the breath of the LORD blows upon it—
Truly the people is grass—
The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God shall stand forever."

On a high mountain get you up,
O heralds of good news to Zion!
Lift up your voice with strength,
O heralds of good news to Jerusalem!
Lift it up, fear not;
Say to the cities of Judah,
"Behold your God!"
See! the Lord God is coming with might,
his own arm having won him the kingdom;
See! his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
Like a shepherd he tends his flock,
with his arm he gathers them;
The lambs he carries in his bosom,
and gently leads those who give suck [40:1-11].

How can he do this? Because he is the Creator of the universe. Has he not weighed the mountains, measured the heavens, and been his own counselor through all the centuries? What are nations to him but a "drop in the bucket?"

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
And ruled off the heavens with a span,
And inclosed in a measure the dust of the earth,
And weighed the mountains with a balance,
And the hills in scales?

Who has directed the mind of the LORD,
And instructed him as his counselor?
With whom took he counsel for his enlightenment,
And who taught him the right path?

Who taught him knowledge,
And showed him the way of intelligence?
Lo! the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
Like fine dust in the scales are they counted.
Lo! the coast-lands weigh no more than a grain;
And Lebanon itself is not sufficient for fuel,
Nor are its beasts enough for burnt-offering.
All the nations are as nothing before him,
Blank ciphers he counts them [40:12-17].

Then the writer gives us a vivid description of the way in which idols are made by men's hands. In that land of many idols he boldly declares their futility. He follows with a contrasting description of God as creator and ruler of the universe. Before God, this great creator, all earthly rulers are as nothing. *Our* God, he says, is the Lord of the heavens, as well as of the earth, and he is never weary. Those that trust in him shall be like him. They shall mount on wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, for with those that will trust in him, he will share his strength.

To whom, then, would you liken God,
Or what likeness would you place over against him?
An idol! the smelter casts it,

And the goldsmith overlays it with gold,
And fastens it with silver links.
Each one helps his fellow,
And says to his comrade, "Have courage!"
The smelter cheers on the goldsmith,
He that smooths with the hammer, him that strikes
 with the mallet,
Saying of the riveting, "It is good!"
As he fastens it with nails so that it cannot move.
He who would provide himself with an image
 of wood
Chooses a tree that will not rot;
Then seeks out a skilful workman
To set up an image that cannot move.

Do you not know? Do you not hear?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood since the foundation
 of the earth?
It is he who sits enthroned above the circle
 of the earth,
So high that its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
And spreads them like a tent to dwell in;
Who brings princes to nothing,
And makes the rulers of the earth like a cipher—
Hardly have they been planted, hardly have they
 been sown,
Hardly has their stock taken root in the earth,
When he blows upon them, and they wither,
And the whirlwind carries them away like stubble.
"To whom, then, would you liken me,
That I should be equal," says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high,
And see! who created these?
He who brought forth their host by number,
And called them all by name;
Through the greatness of his might,
And the strength of his power,
Not one is missing.

Why should you say, O Jacob,
 And speak, O Israel:
 "My way is hidden from the LORD,
 And my rights are passed over by my God?"
 Have you not known? Have you not heard?
 The LORD is a God everlasting,
 The Creator of the ends of the earth.
 He does not faint, nor grow weary;
 His insight is unfathomable.
 He gives power to the fainting,
 And to him that has no might he increases strength.
 Though the youths faint and grow weary,
 Though the young men fall prostrate,
 They that wait on the LORD shall renew their strength,
 They shall mount on wings like eagles,
 They shall run and not be weary,
 They shall walk and not faint [40:18, 19; 41:6, 7; 40:20-31].

The prophet seems to point clearly to the coming of
 Cyrus as "one from the east," called of God, nations leveled
 before him. He is on the way.

Listen to me in silence, you coast-lands,
 And let the nations await my argument;
 Then let them approach, then let them speak,
 And together let us draw near for judgment!
 Who has roused one from the east,
 Calling him in righteousness to his service,
 Giving up nations before him,
 And bringing down kings;
 With his sword making them like dust,
 Like driven stubble with his bow;
 Pursuing them, and passing on safely,
 By paths his feet have not trodden?
 Who has wrought and done this,
 Proclaiming at the beginning the generations to come?
 I, the LORD, who am the first,
 And am also with the last [41:1-4].

But still there are the many gods of Babylon. What
 about them? Can they not circumvent this work of God?

Surely they have been powerful in creating Babylon with all its riches and splendor and in the destruction of Jerusalem. The prophet answers this very natural assumption and fear. He calls upon the people in imagination to marshal the idols in the face of the coming catastrophe, and he challenges these idol-gods to declare the future, or even anything, good or evil. Let them prove even that they can speak. Then he taunts them for their silence which, he declares, testifies to their utter uselessness. They are "wind and emptiness" and utterly powerless in this great emergency.

"Present your case,"

says the LORD;

"Bring forward your champions,"

says the king of Jacob.

"Let them approach and tell us

what is to happen:

Tell us what the former things were,

that we may lay them to heart

Or the things that are coming announce to us,

that we may know their issue.

Tell us the things that are coming hereafter,

that we may know that you are gods;

That you can do good and do evil,

that we may be dismayed and frightened too.

But lo! you are nought,

And your work is a blank;

an abomination is he who chooses you."

I have roused one from the north, and he comes—

From the east he calls on my name;

He shall tread down rulers like mortar,

As the potter tramples clay.

Who foretold it from the first, that we might know,

And beforehand, that we might say, "Right"?

There was none that foretold, none that announced,

None that heard words from you.

I first told it to Zion,

And sent heralds of good news to Jerusalem;
 But of these there was no one, of these no counselor,
 That, when I asked them, could answer a word.
 Lo! they are all of them nought, their deeds a blank,
 Their molten images wind and waste [41:21-29].

Indeed, God is the only one who can declare himself. "I am the first, and I am the last; and, besides me, there is no God. I alone can declare the future."

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
 His Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
 "I am the first, and I the last;
 Apart from me there is no God.
 Who is like me? Let him proclaim it,
 Let him declare it, and lay it out before me!
 Who has announced from of old the things to come?
 Let them tell the things that are to be!
 Fear not, nor be disquieted!
 Did I not of old announce and declare it to you,
 With you as my witnesses?
 Is there a God beside me,
 Or a Rock of whom I know not?" [44:6-8].

Again the idols are attacked, this time through a marvelous and much more detailed description of the process of making idols. One feels that this picture reflects things actually going on in Babylon. It is said that Nabonidas, the king, was especially devoted to religion, had erected many temples, and had filled the cities with gods. There was in this crisis, doubtless, an increased activity among the idol-makers and a fresh demand for their products. Can we visualize the situation? The passage ends in scorn unutterable for those who have neither the knowledge nor the understanding to see how utterly futile these man-made gods were.

The makers of idols are all of them inane, their precious products are good for nothing, and their devotees are without sight or sense—that they

may be put to shame! Whoever, then, fashions a god or casts an image that is good for nothing, all who hold to it will be put to shame, since the workmen are but human beings. Let all of them assemble and take their stand; they will be put to terror and shame together.

The workman in iron works it over the coals, and shapes it with hammers, working it with his strong arm. Then he becomes hungry, and loses his strength; unless he drinks water, he grows faint.

The workman in wood draws a measuring-line over it, shapes it with a pencil, works it with planes, shapes it with compasses, and makes it into the likeness of a man, with a beauty like that of the human form—to sit in a house!

A man cuts down a cedar, or takes a plane or an oak, or lays hold of some other tree of the forest, which the LORD planted and the rain has nourished for man to use as fuel. He takes part of it and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread; then he makes a god and worships it, he molds an image and prostrates himself before it. Half of it he burns in the fire, and on its embers he roasts flesh; he eats the roast and is satisfied; he also warms himself, and says, "Ha! ha! I am warm, I feel the glow." And the rest of it he makes into a god—his idol!—prostrates himself before it, worships it, and prays to it, saying, "Save me, for thou art my god!"

They have no knowledge and no intelligence; for their eyes are besmeared so that they cannot see, and their minds are dulled so that they cannot understand. No one has sense or knowledge or intelligence to say, "Half of it have I burned in the fire, and on its embers have I baked bread, and I am roasting flesh and eating it; and the rest of it shall I make into an abomination, and prostrate myself before a block of wood?"

Feeder on ashes! A deluded mind has led him astray, so that he cannot save himself, or confess, "Am not I holding to a delusion?" [44:9-20].

But how about all the denunciations of Ezekiel and Jeremiah and the lamented heresies and wickedness of the people with which they were familiar. These prophets had held that no punishment was too severe for the people of God. Is he through with his punishment? Are there no penalties concealed by his gracious attitude toward the exiled ones? Isaiah recalls these former judgments, and their severity, but he proclaims a great redemption.

Who gave up Jacob to despoilers,
 Israel to plunderers?
 Was it not the LORD, against whom they sinned,
 And in whose ways they would not walk,
 And to whose instruction they did not listen?
 So he poured upon them the heat of his anger,
 And the fierceness of war,
 Which wrapped them round in flames, although
 they understood it not,
 And burned them, although they laid it not to heart.

.

But now thus says the LORD,
 Who created you, O Jacob, and formed you, O Israel:
 "Fear not, for I have redeemed you,
 I have called you by your name—you are mine!
 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you,
 And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
 When you walk through the fire, you shall not
 be scorched,
 Or through the flame, it will not burn you;
 For I the LORD am your God,
 I the Holy One of Israel am your savior.
 Egypt I give as your ransom,
 Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you;
 Because you are precious in my sight,
 Honored and loved by me,
 Lands I give in exchange for you,
 And peoples instead of you.
 Fear not, for I am with you;
 From the east will I bring your descendants,
 And from the west will I gather you;
 I will say to the north, 'Give up!'
 And to the south, 'Hold not back!
 Bring my sons from afar,
 And my daughters from the end of the earth;
 Every one who is called by my name,
 Whom I have created and formed,
 And made for my glory' " [42:24, 25; 43:1-7].

All the wrath is now past, he says. "Fear not for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by name, thou art mine." Then follows a promise of comfort and safety, honor and loving-kindness; a reassembling of the scattered ones from the ends of the earth, all sins blotted out. He ends in a burst of exultation.

Remember these things, O Jacob,
Israel, for you are my servant!
I formed you, my servant you are,
O Israel, who will not be forgotten by me.
I have blotted out your transgressions like a mist,
Your sins like a cloud;
Return to me, for I have redeemed you.
Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it,
Shout, O depths of the earth;
Break into singing, O mountains,
O forest, and every tree in it!
For the LORD has redeemed Jacob,
And is revealing his glory in Israel [44:21-23].

These were great words. The idealistic among the people might be swept forward in supreme anticipation. The practical-minded would be full of fears and uncertainties, or worse, indifference. No new philosophy ever swayed more than a few idealists at first.

But Cyrus was on the march. He entered Babylon about 538 B.C., meeting with practically no resistance. In all probability he put into practice his custom of handling captive peoples by repatriating them, that is, permitting them to return to their homelands. But such a permission given to the Hebrews would not necessarily be popular, as we have already surmised. Hardships, many and long, awaited those who dared to go. It was a dread journey. They were by no means persuaded. The prophet's task was not finished. Possibly no great return ever did take place at any one time,

but little by little some were persuaded, and for this we must thank such leaders as this second Isaiah.

This prophet was no pure idealist. He was a practical man who could sense what could happen in the world about him. He hails the coming of Cyrus and puts the stamp of his approval upon him. He claims that Cyrus has been led by the hand of God and commanded to let the Hebrews go free in order that they may rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

Thus says the LORD to his anointed,
 To Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped,
 To bring down nations before him,
 And to ungird the loins of kings,
 To open doors before him,
 And that gates may not be closed:
 "I will go before you,
 And will level the rugged heights;
 The doors of bronze will I break in pieces,
 And the bars of iron will I cut asunder;
 I will give you the treasures of darkness,
 The hoards of secret places;
 That you may know that I am the LORD,
 That I who have called you by name am the God of Israel.
 For the sake of Jacob my servant,
 And Israel my chosen one,
 I have called you by name,
 I have surnamed you, though you knew me not.
 I am the LORD, and there is no other;
 Beside me there is no God.
 I will gird you, though you knew me not,
 That men may know, from the east
 And from the west, that beside me there is none.
 I am the LORD, and there is no other—
 Who forms light, and creates darkness,
 Who makes weal, and creates woe—
 I the LORD am he who does all these things.

.

I made the earth,
And created man upon it;
My hands stretched out the heavens,
And all their host I marshaled;
I have roused one in righteousness,
And all his ways will I level;
He shall build my city,
And shall set my exiles free,
Not for price or reward,"
Says the LORD of hosts [45:1-7, 12-13].

Then he continues to persuade, "Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans" (48:20, 21). When the smallness of numbers was pleaded, he assures his people of hosts of their fellow-countrymen gathering from many lands.

But Zion says, "The LORD has forsaken me,
The Lord has forgotten me!"
"Can a woman forget her sucking child,
So as not to have pity upon the son of her womb?
Even should these forget,
Yet I will not forget you.
See! I have carved you upon the palms of my hands;
Your walls are continually before me.
Already your builders make haste,
While those who destroyed you and laid you waste
go forth from you.
Lift up your eyes round about, and see!
All of them gather, they come to you.
As I live," is the oracle of the LORD,
"All of them shall you put on as an ornament,
And shall gird about you like a bride.
For your waste and desolate places shall be restored,
And your land that was ravaged shall be filled
with inhabitants.
For now shall you become too narrow for
your inhabitants,
Since those who swallowed you up are far away.
The children that were born to you in your
time of bereavement

Shall yet say in your ears,
 'The place is too narrow for us;
 Make room for us to dwell in!'
 And you shall say to yourself,
 'Who can have borne me these?
 I was bereaved and barren, exiled and banished,
 But these—who can have reared them?
 Lo! I was left alone;
 Whence can these have come?' ”

Thus says the Lord God:
 “Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations,
 And to the peoples will I raise my signal;
 And they shall bring your sons in their bosom,
 And your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.
 And kings shall be your foster fathers,
 And their queens your nursing-mothers;
 With their faces to the earth shall they bow down to you,
 And shall lick the dust of your feet;
 And you shall know that I am the LORD,
 In whom none that trust shall be put to shame” [49:14–23].

He cites former occasions on which this great God had led his people as they followed Abraham, and even through the great deep, as with Moses in the escape from Egypt.

Awake, awake, put on strength,
 O arm of the LORD!
 Awake, as in days of old,
 as in generations long gone!
 Was it not thou that didst hew Rahab in pieces,
 that didst pierce the dragon?
 Was it not thou that didst dry up the sea,
 the waters of the mighty deep;
 That didst make the depths of the sea a way
 for the redeemed to pass over?
 So the ransomed of the LORD will return by it,
 And will come to Zion with singing,
 And with everlasting joy upon their heads;
 They will attain to joy and gladness,
 And sorrow and sighing will flee away [51:9–11].

He pictures the flight and its glories.

Awake, awake, put on
your strength, O Zion;
Put on your beautiful garments,
O Jerusalem, the holy city!
For no more shall there come to you
an uncircumcised or unclean one.

Shake yourself from the dust, arise,
O captive Jerusalem;
Free yourself from the bonds on your neck,
O captive daughter of Zion!

For thus says the LORD:

"For nought were you sold,
and without money shall you be redeemed."

For thus says the Lord God:

"To Egypt went down my people at the first to sojourn there,
And the Assyrians oppressed them without cause;
But now what find I here?" is the oracle of the LORD.

"That my people have been taken captive for nought,
That their rulers howl over them," is the oracle of the LORD,
"And that all day long my name is despised!
Therefore my people shall know my name,
They shall know on that day that it is I who have spoken—
See! here I am."

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the heralds,
Who bring good news of peace,
news of salvation,

Who say to Zion,
"Your God has become king."

Hark! your watchmen lift up the voice,
together they sing;

For eye to eye they shall see,
when the LORD restores Zion.

Break into singing together,
you waste places of Jerusalem!

For the LORD has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

And have grasped you by the hand;
I have kept you, and have made you a pledge
to the people,
A light to the nations;
In opening blind eyes,
In bringing prisoners out of the dungeon,
Those who sit in darkness out of the prison.
I am the LORD, that is my name;
And my glory will I not give to another,
Nor my praise to carved images.
The former things, lo! they have come to pass,
And new things I foretell;
Before they spring into being,
I announce them to you" [42:5-9].

Listen, you coast-lands, to me;
Hearken, you peoples afar!
The LORD called me from birth,
From my mother's womb he gave me my name.
He made my mouth like a sharp sword,
In the shadow of his hand he hid me;
He made me a polished arrow,
In his quiver he concealed me.
He said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, through whom I will show forth my glory."
But I said, "In vain have I labored,
Idly and for nought have I spent my strength;
Nevertheless, my right is with the LORD,
And my reward with my God."
And now the LORD,
Who formed me from the womb to be his servant,
Says that he will bring back Jacob to himself,
And that Israel shall be gathered to him—
For I am honored in the eyes of the LORD,
And my God has become my strength—
He says, "It is too slight a thing for your being my servant
That I should but raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And restore the survivors of Israel;
So I will make you a light of the nations,

That my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" [49:1-6].

Lo! my servant shall prosper,
 He shall be exalted, and lifted up, and shall be very high.
 As many were amazed at him—
 So marred was his appearance beyond that of a man,
 And his form beyond that of the sons of men—
 So shall he startle many nations,
 On account of him kings shall shut their mouths;
 For what has not been told them shall they see,
 And what they have not heard shall they contemplate.

"Who could have believed what we heard?
 And the arm of the LORD—to whom has it been revealed?
 For he grew up like a sapling before us,
 Like a root out of dry ground;
 He had no form or charm, that we should look upon him,
 No beauty, that we should admire him.
 He was despised, and avoided by men,
 A man of sorrows, and acquainted with pain;
 And like one from whom men hide their faces,
 He was despised, and we esteemed him not.

"Yet it was our pains that he bore,
 Our sorrows that he carried;
 While we accounted him stricken,
 Smitten by God, and afflicted.
 He was wounded for our transgressions,
 He was crushed for our iniquities;
 The chastisement of our welfare was upon him,
 And through his stripes we were healed.
 All we like sheep had gone astray,
 We had turned everyone to his own way;
 And the LORD made to light upon him
 The guilt of us all.

"When he was oppressed, he humbled himself,
 And opened not his mouth;
 Like a sheep that is led to the slaughter,
 Or like a ewe that is dumb before her shearers,

He opened not his mouth.
Through violence in judgment was he taken away,
And who gave thought to his fate—
How he was cut off from the land of the living,
For our transgressions was stricken to death?
They made his grave with the wicked,
His tomb with evildoers;
Although he had done no violence,
Nor was any deceit in his mouth.”

Yet the LORD saw fit to crush him with pain,
So that when he makes himself a guilt-offering,
He shall see posterity, shall prolong his life,
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.
The fruit of his suffering shall he see, and be satisfied;
Through his affliction shall my servant, the Righteous One,
Bring righteousness to many,
And he shall bear their guilt.
Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great,
And with the strong shall he share the spoil;
Because he poured out his lifeblood to the utmost,
And was numbered with the transgressors,
While he bore the sin of many,
And made intercession for the transgressors [52:13—53:12].

There has been a great deal of difference of opinion about the date and the interpretation of these songs. We must choose between the various points of view, some of which deny these songs to Isaiah and place them in a much later period. We shall follow one of the best recent scholars, however, in reading them in connection with this second Isaiah. They are beautiful in form, and their great theme is the mission of God's servant to the world, that servant being Israel. The world shall come to see his glorious commission. The work of the servant has been not only to raise up the tribes of Jacob, God's own people, and to restore Israel but to be a "light to the Gentiles" and to be the salvation of

the Lord "unto the ends of the earth." "I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness. I will hold thy hand and will give thee for a covenant of the people for a light to the Gentiles." The last of these songs begins with a message of prosperity and exaltation, so great that the nations will be startled, because they had not believed that anything good could come from this afflicted people. But, reasons the prophet, all the suffering which the servant has borne was for the sake of others. The fate of the nation rested upon those who might come through their sufferings still faithful to their God. The righteous among them were allowed to suffer in order that they might preserve not only their own people but all mankind. This is a free interpretation of the great principle of vicarious suffering which had from earliest times been suggested in the offering of living creatures for sacrifice. Here was something on a far grander scale, the suffering of a people on behalf of their nation and the world. Small wonder that centuries later this poem of the suffering servant became a picture of the Christ redeeming the world by his suffering.

We can cite only one further passage, a paean of joy in the midst of which we find the answer to the question, "How can God do these things? How can he think these thoughts or entertain these purposes?" The answer is:

"Seek the LORD while he may be found,
 Call upon him while he is near!
 Let the wicked forsake his way,
 And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
 And let him return to the LORD, that he may have pity
 upon him,
 And to our God, for he shall abundantly pardon.
 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
 Nor are your ways my ways," is the oracle of the LORD;
 "But as the heavens are higher than the earth,

So are my ways higher than your ways,
And my thoughts than your thoughts" [55:6-9].

Surely the second Isaiah was a great personality, "thinking God's thoughts after him." We wish we knew more about him, the particular circumstances of his life, the details of the opposition which he must have met, the buoyancy of his soul, the magnetism of his speech, and his ability to inspire people with the courage of a great adventure, but he must remain the unknown poet of the exile.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

As literature, we find the contributions of this book more beautiful than any which we have examined. Once the general setting is established, the poetry moves us as it moved the people of Israel. Without that setting it means infinitely less.

We welcome, also, the religious philosophy of the poet; the principle of vicarious suffering which he presents is a foundation stone in our religious belief. It is universal. We have recognized it in science, in human history, and in current life, as well as in religion. We feel grateful to this second Isaiah for a key to the meaning of much of the suffering of the world.

It seems almost as if he were arguing against the philosophy of Ezekiel, who fifty years earlier had achieved through struggle the doctrine that each sinner suffered alone for his sin. This prophet saw that as at least an incomplete philosophy. Indeed, we cannot fit the second Isaiah into the garments of any earlier prophet. He has outgrown them.

The plenitude of his idea of God is magnificent. He gathers up into it all the good that has hitherto been suggested, declaring him the creator of the universe and everything in it, the arbiter of human destiny, the inspirer of

human history, the one and only God, all-powerful, all-seeing, all-loving, all-righteous. No wonder the prophet is jubilant. In its completeness, and the inferences which he could draw from it, it had new aspects to him and to his generation. What more marvelous destiny for any nation than to be the messenger of this truth to the world? The goal of any other nation was insignificant compared to that.

We shall observe as we go on that never again was Israel guilty of idolatry. It was dead. God had at last triumphed in their hearts.

But there is another aspect of this poet's vision which gives inspiration today. That is, its indomitable hope. With not a trace of failure to recognize responsibility, it presents a spirit of confidence, joy, and exultation in that which is to come—a confidence which would remove mountains of difficulty and hesitation, and, did we possess it, keep us on the march to every desired goal. "The best is yet to be." Who can falter? Go forth with shouting in the confidence of an all-powerful, universal, and invincible God. Why wonder that the Jew has been able to do great things, with these words of his own prophet ringing in his ears!

As we read, we may pause to reflect upon our debt to the Jew. Is he still suffering for the sake of some great revelation which God would make to the world if the right vehicle could be prepared? What is our responsibility to this people upon whose agonies the foundations of our religion were laid?

How shall we use this book in religious education? Let us, first of all, read it and enjoy it. Let us dwell upon its philosophy and its dauntless spirit. Nothing too good or too great for the servant of God, man, or nation who co-operates with him; suffering may be his lot; it is still good.

This seems a book for adults, for its teaching can be rarely corroborated in the experience of youth. Yet, in its boundless hope, it may have a message even for them. Special suggestions of method may be left to the teacher in the light of the circumstances.

A splendid task for our young people might be in the study of the contribution of the Jew in science, art, literature, finance, social justice, and religion.

Is Israel still the "Suffering Servant"? Has any nation today the right to the title "Servant of God" to bring light and life to the world? Can he do his work for humanity without such a servant?

A question for debate: Are the sufferings of the Jews today in any way related to those of ancient times? Where does the blame lie?

CHAPTER XVI

RECONSTRUCTION OF IDEALS, LITERATURE, LAWS, AND A CITY

THE BOOK OF EZRA; THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH; THE
FIRST AND SECOND BOOKS OF CHRONICLES
SELECTIONS FROM THE PENTATEUCH

AS WE think of the Hebrews in those disastrous years after the exile, we visualize them not as one group but as several. There were those who remained in the land after the destruction of the city who were of the lowest classes. These would gradually be augmented by some of those inhabitants of Jerusalem who had earlier fled to other parts of Palestine, in fear and anticipation of the coming of Nebuchadnezzar. Others would remain in the countries of their refuge. We recall that a company, including Jeremiah, finally went down into Egypt. There had been many Jews there from earliest days.¹

But to Babylonia we have already followed the choicest group of the citizens of Jerusalem—king and princes, officials, leading citizens, skilled craftsmen, priests, and prophets, those best qualified to create and to lead. From these the traditional “return” came about. Here were the men who never lost sight of an ideal future and a restored Israel. They dreamed of it, sang of it, and planned for it. They had suffered, but they thought that they knew why. Israel was being prepared to lead the world. She was afflicted in order

¹ A translation of the Pentateuch was eventually made by Alexandrian Jews for use in their worship. Other books of the Bible were added later and the whole collection called the Septuagint. This very early translation has been useful to Hebrew scholars in verifying text.

that she might become the servant who should teach the world the real nature of God. So sang the second Isaiah and many others.

And what was it they were to teach about God? He was long-suffering, faithful, comforting, sustaining, but above all the creator of the universe, the ruler of all nations, and *the only God*.

We have now to deal with a flood of literature, the result of a great religious and literary impulse through which these changing conceptions of God, the destiny of Palestine and of the scattered Jews, were welded into a new philosophy of life.

The Babylonian Jews had taken with them into captivity treasures which would be unnoticed by their captors, precious literary records. Recall that they were of the official class, among them, priests. They would certainly not leave behind the combined narrative of J and E recounting Israel's ancestry and fortunes from Adam to the death of Solomon, the books of Samuel, and the old records of Solomon's reign. There were also official records of the kings of the northern and southern kingdoms, collections of Elijah and Elisha stories, collections of the speeches of Amos, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Naham, and Habakkuk, as well as sermons of the first Isaiah and Jeremiah, which were then current.

Many of these may have been only in private hands, but now they would acquire new value and copies would be multiplied. Songs and scattered poems celebrating events and individuals would now be shown about as prized possessions. Small collections of sayings would again acquire permanent value. But, of all these, the lawbook found in the temple in the days of Josiah would seem most precious. It represented God's covenant with the people, and theirs

with him, and many details of its application to life. Although they could no longer worship their God in Jerusalem according to many of the instructions of this book, it was a memorial of what had been and gave hope for the future.

Such was the literature which was destined to prove the nucleus of some of the greatest that the world has seen, as well as the inspiration for numbers of the world's most potent religious leaders. When at last some did return to Jerusalem, they carried with them not only these literary treasures that had been taken into Babylon but the fruits of their labors while there.

We recall the kindly spirit which pervaded the lawbook found in the temple. Now in Babylon a group of religious leaders inspired with this principle undertook to re-write the great historical sagas of J and E, saturating them with this new thought of God intensified into love.

Stories of the conquest as a series of miraculous raids under the leadership of Joshua and his hosts, completing the occupation in a few years, were more popular now than those stories in the Book of Judges representing slow and difficult progress through centuries. To the lawbook of Deuteronomy were added great orations of Moses, preliminary to entering the land, and the account of his death. One of these speeches contains the injunction, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy mind, and with all thy heart, and with all thy strength." The Ten Commandments are reiterated, and the Fourth, concerning the Sabbath, is to be observed as an act of gratitude because God had brought his people out of slavery into freedom. The story of the Judges was placed in a new theological framework, which we found it necessary to set aside when we were trying to discover the living heroes of these stories. It averred, "Then the Israelites did evil in the sight of the

Lord, so that the Lord delivered them to the power of. . . ." Then after the insertion of the story of deliverance, under a hero raised up by God for the occasion, there follows "and the land enjoyed security for forty years."

But the Book of Kings, with its politico-religious history of the two kingdoms is a monument to the efforts of leaders in this work of revision; to them their history was important only in explaining their relation to God. Now we are able to see why great kings, because religiously displeasing or indifferent, had scant or harsh notice, while minor kings, who magnified the worship of God, are given whole chapters. God alone was important, and his interference with human affairs was taken for granted.

Thus we see that, while only Ezekiel and the second Isaiah stand out in this period of exile, and we can bring to life few individuals, these years found many unknown persons active in preserving and recasting historic and religious records, revising laws, producing poetry, and conserving teachings from the past and present. It was indeed a period of great literary activity among the Jews in Babylon.

We have not space to go into the details of the complicated and kaleidoscopic history of all the centuries which elapsed between any significant return of the Jews to Palestine and the beginning of New Testament times. Suffice it to say that as a background of its literature we can assume centuries of struggle in Palestine with poverty, lawlessness, aggressions of surrounding peoples, changes from Persian to Greek, and Greek to Roman, rule, and the rise of persecutions of the Jews on account of their religious faith, that continue to this day, provoked in each succeeding century by reasons sufficient only to the persecutors. For all these data one should study a history of the Jews. We have simply been trying to establish the principle of presenting personalities,

as the best process of bringing the literature of the Bible to life.

The task grows more difficult in the years when the Hebrews were submerged by other nations and scattered throughout the known world, their prophets few, their priests often without a sanctuary, their lives distracted by personal disaster and by new interests found in their intermingling with other nations. Their fate was more than ever tangled in a web of political life not their own, for after the exile they became not a nation politically organized but a religious community. Their only hope lay in maintaining their religious unity and their separateness from the world about them.

The stream of literature coming to us from these centuries falls into different currents. Yet again a new group arose which sought to strengthen the hold of the past by repeating the process of re-writing national history and reinterpreting it according to a hard theology which they had by this time achieved. Its basis was the old doctrine of the holiness of God, in whose sight they felt that the nation had so pitifully failed. Only by the enforcement of extremely detailed and meticulous laws which were now formulated or collected from older codes could the remnant of the nation hope to work its way, so to speak, back to the favor of a righteous God. Here is the work of P. The Book of Leviticus and portions of Exodus are representative. In history the chronicler stands out as our only identifiable annalist of this period. He has left us First and Second Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, a greatly altered Pentateuch, and a revised Joshua. Whether he was one or many we do not know, but around all these is wrapped a new atmosphere of ceremonial. Everything in ritual was exaggerated and dated back. Convinced that it had divine sanction, they felt that it must have

come down in spirit if not in form from most ancient times. Genealogical lists gave stress to keeping the Jewish race pure, and an elaborate tabernacle was said to have been erected in the wilderness with an ark to correspond. Also a sacred and well-organized order of priests was claimed to be hereditary. In fact, they believed that all these legalistic measures were but a modern and complete presentation of the plan and purpose of God, as revealed to Moses.

Priestly folk were now leading, with a high priest over all. The prophets were no longer in evidence. Their doctrine of personal responsibility was, generally speaking, superseded by that of intercession by priests, and controlled by regulatory laws. Only Ezra and Nehemiah, with their efforts among the repatriated citizens of Jerusalem, whom they sought to protect from religious contamination by isolation from their neighbors, are human figures.

Nehemiah rouses a response in modern times through the story of his patriotism and unselfish public spirit. His story can be easily reconstructed from his diary, plus our already achieved knowledge of the situation (Neh. 1:1—7:5; 12: 27—47; chap. 13).

Its outline may be: Nehemiah's distress and his commission; the long rebuilding of the walls; the journey; Nehemiah's sensible and staunch resistance; dedication of the walls; and reform measures. The man stands out simple, direct, social-minded and beneficent, but not seriously concerned with religion.

Ezra, with his excessive zeal, pains rather than inspires us. It is difficult for us to forgive him for the broken homes caused by his condemnation of, and harsh measures taken against, families of mixed marriages. These had been innocently entered into, with perfectly good intent, with many who had been kind to returning Jews, and some of whom

had grown up in Judea during the exile (Ezra, chaps. 9 and 10). Perhaps if we knew all the circumstances we would more fully appreciate what was certainly to him a crucial religious problem. His was the spirit that centuries later appeared in exaggerated form among the scribes and pharisees of Jesus' day.

In Ezra we have a representative of those Jews of Babylonia who tried to bring their fellow-countrymen into line with their religious ideas, worked out with minute detail and patience in a foreign land. Jerusalem and Palestine must be reclaimed for God, and the temple rebuilt. On its soil alone could be manifested the faithfulness and power of God. He had made a covenant with them in ancient times, promising them the land of Palestine, conditioned on their obedience and faithfulness. That covenant still stood. But the conditions! How could they be met? Only by punctilious observance of law and complete severance from other people.

The need for disciplinary suffering was now past. A revised, holy, and comprehensive law would suffice to keep the people in God's favor (see Numbers and Leviticus). This was a change of emphasis by religious leaders rather than a change of theology. Of course, it was expected that obedience to law would be accompanied by moral idealism and a social spirit. We are indebted to Leviticus for that noble saying, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (19:18). We wonder just when some great priest-poet, brought closer to the law that Creator-God, by writing the first chapter of Genesis. Such a poem answers the question which must often have arisen as to how God created the universe. Its climax in the holy Sabbath and the injunction to observe it would well fit into this period. Read it with this

background in mind. Note the refrain, "Evening came, and morning," ending appropriately at each day.

When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was a desolate waste, with darkness covering the abyss and a tempestuous wind raging over the surface of the waters. Then God said,

"Let there be light!"

And there was light; and God saw that the light was good. God then separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness night. Evening came, and morning, the first day.

Then God said,

"Let there be a firmament in the middle of the waters to divide the waters in two!"

And so it was. God made the firmament, dividing the waters that were below the firmament from those that were above it; and God called the firmament sky. Evening came, and morning, the second day.

Then God said,

"Let the waters below the sky be gathered into one place so that the dry land may appear!"

And so it was. God called the dry land earth, and the gathered waters seas. God saw that it was good.

Then God said,

"Let the earth produce vegetation, seed-bearing plants and the various kinds of fruit-trees that bear fruit containing their seed!"

And so it was. The earth brought forth vegetation, the various kinds of seed-bearing plants and the various kinds of trees that bear fruit containing their seed. God saw that it was good. Evening came, and morning, the third day.

Then God said,

"Let there be luminaries in the firmament of the sky to separate day from night; let them serve for signs, for fixed times, and for days and years; and let them serve as luminaries in the firmament of the sky to shed light on the earth!"

And so it was. God made the two great luminaries, the greater luminary to rule the day and the smaller one to rule the night—and the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the sky to shed light on the earth, to rule by day and by night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. Evening came, and morning, the fourth day.

Then God said,

"Let the waters teem with shoals of living creatures, and let birds fly over the earth across the firmament of the sky!"

And so it was. God created the great sea-monsters and all the various kinds of living, gliding creatures with which the waters teem, and all the various kinds of winged birds. God saw that it was good, and God blessed them, saying,

"Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the waters in the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth!"

Evening came, and morning, the fifth day.

Then God said,

"Let the earth bring forth the various kinds of living creatures, the various kinds of domestic animals, reptiles, and wild beasts of the earth!"

And so it was. God made the various kinds of wild beasts of the earth, the various kinds of domestic animals, and all the various kinds of land reptiles; and God saw that it was good.

Then God said,

"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the domestic animals, the wild beasts, and all the land reptiles!"

So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; he created both male and female. Then God blessed them, and God said to them,

"Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the domestic animals, and all the living things that crawl on the earth!"

Further, God said,

"See, I give you all the seed-bearing plants that are found all over the earth, and all the trees which have seed-bearing fruit; it shall be yours to eat. To all the wild beasts of the earth, to all the birds of the air, and to all the land reptiles, in which there is a living spirit, I give all the green plants for food."

And so it was. God saw that all that he had made was very good. Evening came, and morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their host. On the seventh day God brought his work to an end on which he had been engaged, desisting on the seventh day from all his work in which he had been engaged. So God blessed the seventh day, and consecrated it, because on it he had desisted from all his work, in doing which God had brought about creation.

Had it not been for this ritualistic cohesion of the people held together by law within a close-locked sectarianism, the treasures of Hebrew history and literature and the bedrock of a future Christianity might have been scattered to the winds. We can rail against the formalism and exaggerated ritual of this period (see Leviticus and portions of Exodus and Numbers), but it did yeomen service in furnishing the protecting cradle for the preservation of reverence for God, and an opportunity for his worship, through a period of desperate circumstances. It was not dead and meaningless to the Jew but vital with religious feeling. Without it paganism would have prevailed. Remember that, while these things were happening to the Jews, Greece was dazzling the world with the glory of Athens and of Corinth, and Greek tragedians and philosophers were interpreting life not alone to Greeks, but, in a cosmopolitan city like Athens, to many others, and to Jews in Alexandria. We may well ask, "How did the *religion* of the Jews survive in such an impossible atmosphere?"

Three minor prophets break the silence of this period, using the old prophetic method of vision and exhortation. These are Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. That the law did not change the nature of man we are able to see through these prophets. They protest against the hypocrisy of many who ostensibly honor God by obeying the law but who really stint their offerings and render lip service alone, thinking to cheat God himself. They scathingly predict a day of judgment when all such shall find their folly exposed, and when sincere worshipers alone, whose offerings are backed up by moral living, shall be gloriously rewarded.

"Though I, the LORD, change not,
You, O sons of Jacob, are not destroyed.
From the days of your fathers you have revolted

From my statutes, and have not kept them.
Return unto me, that I may return to you,"
Says the LORD of hosts.

"But you say, 'How shall we return?'
Should man rob God?
Yet you are robbing me!
But you say, 'How have we robbed thee?'
In the tithe and the contribution!
With a curse are you accursed;
For you are robbing me; this whole nation!
Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse,
That there may be food in my house,
And test me now in this way," says the LORD of hosts,
"And see if I will not open for you the windows
of the heavens,
And pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need.
"Then I will rebuke the devourer for you,
So that he shall not destroy for you the products
of the soil.
Nor shall the vine in the field cast its grapes for you,"
Says the LORD of hosts,
"And all the nations shall call you blessed,
For you shall be a land of delight,"
Says the LORD of hosts [Mal. 3:6-12].²

A living story can be created by putting together the story of the rebuilding and dedication of the temple and the events leading up to it, although one is compelled to accept it simply as a story, disregarding dates and a decree of Cyrus which cannot be verified. Such information is not important to us, however. The picture of devotion and enthusiasm is impressive and should be used with readings from the books of Haggai and Zechariah urging people to the task until at last it is achieved (Ezra 3:7-13; 4:1-24; Hag. 1:3-11; 2:3-9; Zech. 1:7-17; 8:1-17).

² Read also 1:1-2:9.

There were poets who sang of sorrow as in the Book of Lamentations, and in many psalms. Isaiah, chapters 56-66, however, contains a different note—"Future joy and gladness and a new unbreakable bond with God, based upon service, humility and fellowship. God has not changed. We have learned to know him. His promises will yet be fulfilled and Israel will bless the world. The righteous shall prosper." Thus they argued. We must read for pure enjoyment the wonderful songs of assured hope. A new Jerusalem, thronging with people, God himself in the midst; all nations recognizing an ideal ruler and coming to Jerusalem to learn lessons of peace, joy, and brotherly kindness—an idealism which has thrilled the world.

Arise, shine! for your light has come,
And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For lo! darkness shall cover the earth,
And thick darkness the peoples;
But upon you the LORD shall rise,
And upon you his glory shall appear;
And nations shall walk by your light,
And kings by the brightness of your rising.

Lift up your eyes round about, and see!
All of them gather, they come to you—
Your sons shall come from afar,
And your daughters shall be borne on the hip.
When you see it, you shall be radiant,
And your heart shall throb and swell;
For the riches of the sea shall be turned to you,
The wealth of the nations shall come to you.

A flood of camels shall cover you,
The young camels of Midian and Ephah;
All those of Sheba shall come;
Gold and frankincense shall they bring,
And shall herald the praises of the LORD.
All the flocks of Kedar shall gather to you,

The rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you;
They shall mount my altar as a well-pleasing sacrifice,
And my glorious house will I glorify.

Who are these that fly like a cloud,
Or like doves to their windows?
It is the ships which are gathering for me,
With the vessels of Tarshish in the van,
To bring your sons from afar,
Their silver and their gold with them,
In honor of the LORD your God,
The Holy One of Israel, because he has glorified you.

And aliens shall build your walls,
And their kinds shall minister to you;
For though in my wrath I smote you,
In my favor will I have pity upon you.
And your gates shall be open continually,
Day and night shall they not be closed.
That men may bring to you the wealth of the nations,
With their kings conducted in state.
For the nation and the kingdom that will not serve you
shall perish—
Utterly waste shall those nations be laid.

The glory of Lebanon shall come to you,
The cypress, the pine, and the larch together,
To glorify the place of my sanctuary,
And that I may do honor to my footstool.
Then the sons of those who oppressed you shall come
bending to you,
And all those who scorned you shall bow down
at the soles of your feet;
And they shall call you, "The city of the LORD,
The Zion of the Holy One of Israel."

Instead of your being forsaken and hated,
With none passing through you,
I will make you a pride forever,
A joy for all generations.
You shall suck the milk of the nations,

The breast of kings shall you suck;
 And you shall know that I the LORD am your savior,
 That your redeemer is the Mighty One of Jacob.

Instead of bronze will I bring gold,
 And instead of iron will I bring silver;
 And instead of wood, bronze,
 And instead of stones, iron;
 And Peace will I make your government,
 And Righteousness your ruler.
 No more shall news of violence be heard in your land,
 Nor of wreck and ruin within your borders,
 But you shall call your walls Salvation,
 And your gates Praise.

No more shall the sun be your light by day,
 Nor the moon by night shine upon you;
 But the LORD shall be your unfailing light,
 And your God your glory.
 No more shall your sun set,
 Nor shall your moon wane;
 For the LORD shall be your unfailing light,
 And your days of mourning shall be ended.

Your people shall be all of them righteous,
 And shall possess the land forever,
 As the shoot of my planting, the work of my hands,
 With which I may glorify myself.
 The least one shall become a tribe,
 The smallest a mighty nation—
 I the LORD will hasten it in its proper time.³

But religiously these fail to move us deeply, because they are based upon a nationalistic scaffolding which has broken down. They do not face the facts of life.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

Much of our literature for study has now become complicated, ritualistic, stiff, and unbending in tone, and the

³ Isaiah, chap. 60, but coming from later times.

voice of prophecy is almost extinguished. Instead, we have law, control, not, it is true, for its own sake but with a noble purpose. Yet it stifles initiative and freedom of thought and speech. Hundreds of years of waiting for an ideal to be fulfilled had passed in the greatest manifestation of a "will to believe" that the world has ever seen. Was the spirit of man ripening for a fresh comprehension of God?

The tendency of this period to visualize the nation as a personality suggests the growing cohesion of the devout. The stubborn certainty of being right finally resulted in the stone wall of opposition which Jesus was later to meet. God had been apprehended. The method of his future revelation was formulated in advance, and he was unchanging. Of new truth there could be none. Yet we shall see that the saving grace of these times lay in the heretics. Although prophecy was practically dead, religion was violently alive.

Here is a question for a debate in any group. Are we now in the midst of such a period of reconstruction? For what religious ideals are we struggling?

CHAPTER XVII

EXPERIENCE OF THE WISE MEN

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS; THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

THERE had always been wise men in Israel. Age and experience were venerated. At least a small collection of wise sayings had doubtless been taken into Babylon, but the wisdom of many sages had now been opened to her, and new value was placed upon sayings culled from the past and verified in her experience.

Very different from the bursts of poetry which we have just noted is the Book of Proverbs, with its collections from different periods combined into a whole in these late years. One collection (10:1—22:16) has been given the name of Solomon, and it may be that in it are some very ancient sayings, even dating back to Solomon's time, and justifying his reputation as a wise man. We are told in another superscription (chap. 25) that King Hezekiah directed the copying and editing of a collection, and a special wise man is named as the author of another collection (chap. 30).

In examining this book, we shall discover underlying ideas in regard to conduct which, out of accepted experience, the people had come to deem wise—that is, the secret of successful living. It gives us the cold side of religion.

In order to read the Proverbs satisfactorily, we should know some of the characteristics of Hebrew poetic form. Rhyming of words is unknown to the Hebrew poet. Rhythm seems sometimes present, but not to be counted upon and never with the regularity of the rhythm of classic poetry. At least we cannot yet see it. There is instead something much

more subtle—a rhythm of thought which is found in a couplet or in a group of several lines. This rhythm of meaning takes three forms called parallelism. It may be synonymous,

Instruct a wise man, and he will become still wiser;
Teach a righteous man, and he will learn the more.

that is, two lines having the same general meaning; or synthetic,

A foolish son is his father's ruin;
And a quarrelsome wife is like a constant drip.

in which the second, or even a third line or more, continues or expands the meaning of the first; or antithetic,

The memory of the righteous is a blessing
But the name of the wicked shall rot.

in which the meaning of the second line presents a contrast with that of the first. To try to identify these forms is as interesting as a puzzle, and after some practice the mental habit of the Hebrew poet becomes temporarily our own.

The same form of parallelism sometimes distinguishes different collections, authors, or compilers. In the collection containing the oldest sayings (10:1—22:16) we have innumerable contrasts between the foolish and the wise, the diligent and the lazy, the righteous and the wicked, the obedient and the disobedient, the violent and the pacific, the thoughtful and the heedless, the truthful and the lying, the wicked rich and the godly poor, the proud and the humble, the false and the true.

The philosophy of life gathered from these sayings seems to be: "In the end the good prosper and the wicked come to grief." Undoubtedly, this was the prevailing theology of the Hebrews, but the years of exile and the scant rewards of the restored Jerusalem did not vindicate it to thoughtful

servants of God. Generations were coming and going in whom the wicked (so called) were triumphant, and the pious shamed and persecuted, In the earlier chapters of the book, probably of later origin, we have a deeper philosophy, extolling wisdom, which is defined as "reverence to the Lord," and his discipline is counted a blessing (3:11, 12). "Knowledge of the Holy One is the beginning of wisdom" (1:7).

An alphabetical poem entitled "The Good Wife" tempts us to read farther:¹

א

If one can find a good wife,
She is worth far more than corals.

ב

Her husband puts his trust in her,
And finds no lack of gain.

ג

She brings him good, and not harm,
All the days of his life.

ד

She sorts out wool and flax,
And works it up as she wills.

ה

She is like the ships of the merchant,
She brings her food from afar.

ו

She rises while it is still night,
And gives her household food,
With a portion for her maidens.

ז

She examines a field, and buys it;
With her earnings she plants a vineyard.

¹ Each couplet is preceded by a letter from the Hebrew alphabet.

ח

She girds her loins with strength,
And she makes her arms strong.

ט

She perceives that her work is profitable,
So her lamp goes not out at night.

י

She lays her hand on the distaff,
Her fingers grasp the spindle.

כ

She stretches her hand to the poor,
She extends her arms to the needy.

ל

She is not afraid of the snow for her household;
For her household are all clothed in scarlet.

מ

She makes coverlets for herself,
Her clothing is linen and purple.

נ

Her husband is known at the gates,
As he sits among the elders of the land.

ס

She makes linen vests, and sells them,
She supplies the merchants with girdles.

ע

She is clothed with strength and dignity,
And she laughs at the days to come.

פ

She opens her mouth in wisdom,
And kindly counsel is on her tongue.

צ

She looks well after her household,
And eats not the bread of idleness.

פ

Her children rise up, and bless her—
Her husband also, and praises her:

י

“Many women have done well,
But you have excelled them all.”

ש

Charms are deceptive, and beauty is a breath;
But a woman who reveres the LORD—
She will be praised.

ת

Give her the due reward of her work;
And let her deeds bring her praise at the gates.

As a matter of fact, however, the Hebrews were finding that experience did not justify the narrowness of some of their ancient beliefs. They had seen generations of just and wise men come and go in poverty. Their people had been disgraced and derided. Indeed poverty seemed more closely related to piety than prosperity. What was wrong with their religion? What would insure happiness?

A skeptic tells us what he thinks about this problem of happiness in the Book of Ecclesiastes. He is a somewhat cynical observer of life. The chapters may not all be the work of one author because they do not always seem consistent with one another. But, whether from one author or several, the general effect is: “We would on the whole better be good. It is the part of wisdom, for the rewards of folly are grief. We know nothing of the future, and life in the present is unsatisfying; neither is the continual search for pleasure satisfying. We had best take what comes and enjoy it, or endure it as the case may be.”

Posing as a wise king in Jerusalem, the writer has tried successively wisdom, which brought sorrow; mirth, which

became mockery; sensual indulgence and wine, hoping to increase powers of enjoyment, all to no avail. Then he tried more constructive living, building houses, orchards, gardens, pools, thus necessitating slaves, flocks, and herds. He added features of entertainment within the home, but only to weary of it all in the end, and to conclude that the second program was indeed wiser than the first, but not more pleasurable. His explanation (3:18-21)—man and beast are alike. They both perish. Nobody knows whether the spirit of man is different from the spirit of the beast.

Perhaps a mere division of the book into titled sections will help the reader.² The endless round of nature (1:1-11); the futility of learning (1:12-18); the futility of all human effort (chap. 2); an orderly world (3:1-8); man's limitations; man and beast being upon the same level (3:9-22); life transitory (4:1-16); vows useless (5:1-9); the only abiding satisfaction—to enjoy his riches and the toil by which he gains them (5:10-20); frustrated desire the greatest evil (6:1-8); man helpless before fate (6:10-12); some old proverbs (7:1-14); the wise way (7:15-29); the caprice of rulers (8:1-9); life better than death, but no accountable moral order in the universe; plenty better than fame; work better than idleness; a wise man's mind better than a fool's (8:10-10:3); miscellaneous maxims (10:4-20); the uncertainty of life (11:1-8). Then comes the famous chapter of advice to the young (11:9-12:8), and the book ends in comment about Koheleth, the wise man who was only "wise," and whose philosophy is summed up in

"Go, eat your food with gladness,
And drink your wine with a happy mind,
For God has already accepted your deeds.

² See also J. M. P. Smith and E. J. Goodspeed, *The Bible: An American Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935).

At all times let your garments be white,
And let not oil be lacking upon your head.
Enjoy life with the wife whom you love
All the days of your empty life,
Which he has given you under the sun;
All your empty life.

“For that is your lot in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or substance or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol whither you are going” [9:7–10].

His religion produced only stoical endurance and politic motives. In other words, it was not religion at all. Though containing many words of wisdom, the person behind them, could we make him live, is not inspiring to youth or to age. He has been remembered chiefly in his advice to youth.

“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth,
And let your mind be glad in the days of your vigor,
And walk in the ways of your mind and in the sight
of your eyes;
But know that for all these things God will bring you
into judgment.
And put away worry from your mind,
And remove evil from your flesh;
For youth and the prime of life are vanity.
Remember your Creator in the days of your vigor,
Before the evil days come,
And the years approach of which you will say,
‘I have no pleasure in them’;
Before the sun becomes dark,
And the light, and the moon, and the stars;
And the clouds return after the rain;
On the day when the guardians of the house tremble,
And the strong men are bent,
And the grinding-maids cease because they are few,
And the ladies peering through the windows
are darkened,

And the doors into the street are closed;
When the sound of the mill is low,
And the sound of the bird is faint,
And all the notes of song sink low;
Also, he is afraid of a height,
And he rejects the almond,
And the locust is burdensome,
And the caper-berry is ineffectual;
Because man is going to his eternal home,
And the mourners go about in the street;
Before the silver cord is severed,
And the golden bowl broken,
And the jar shattered at the spring,
And the wheel broken at the cistern;
And the dust returns to the earth as it was,
And the spirit returns to God who gave it.
Vanity of vanities," says Koheleth, "all is vanity"
[11:9—12:8].

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

All this wisdom interests us because it demonstrates a point of view gained from its writer's experience of life. Our contacts throughout our study have been with the chosen few, those who were furnishing new ideas, expounding new motives, and seeking to share their glowing experience of God with their fellow-countrymen, creative souls. To their interpretation of the past they brought new idealism and were always pushing forward toward an untried and hopeful future. The wise man was concerned with the application of experience to the present. Upon the right solution of present problems of living depended future good. So he drew from the past. "Rules had always worked the same way and always would." Can we not hear him speaking today? "Still, it is a pretty good thing to keep a balance. Experience does count." Probably the proverbs represent the backbone of the Hebrew life better than the prophets.

We must preserve a balance, and teach our youth to do the same. Optimism well based has driving force. Pessimism, if well based, retards too impulsive action. In the long run progress depends upon the united experience of many. The Hebrews had lost great beliefs about which they had built their lives; their image of God had changed almost beyond recognition. They were conserving those great principles which seemed to them to remain incorruptible and unchangeable.

It is interesting to raise a question of how much of this ancient wisdom we ourselves have consciously or unconsciously woven into our life-pattern. What are to us the incorruptible and unchangeable principles of right conduct?

A group of adults or young people would be interested in a study of the rise of modern proverbs, and their comparison as to fundamental character with biblical proverbs. It would be perhaps profitable to attach a proverb as a conclusion to some of the old biblical stories, much as we used to have some homely saying attached to the fables of Aesop.

Proverbs are good to play with and to meditate upon. Let us use them in both ways.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE JUDGMENT DAY; THE UNWILLING MISSIONARY

THE BOOK OF JOEL; THE BOOK OF JONAH

TWO prophets remain to be considered. They spoke very late in Israel's history, and no exact date can be given to them. One of them, Joel, makes a terrible visitation of locusts the occasion for prophecy. We have only to read his first chapter to get the picture. The disaster takes on special significance, for the locusts had destroyed everything, even the materials necessary for the most ordinary sacrifices in the Lord's house. These were days when offerings, as prescribed in late stringent ceremonial laws, were deemed necessary to insure the favor of God. When they were not offered, what disaster might not come?

Persons in our own country who have experienced the swarms of grasshoppers which have sometimes swept across our far western prairies have described them as appearing "like a black cloud" and creating just such devastation as this prophet pictures.¹ The description continues, increasing in vividness and now coupled with the thought of the Lord's day of judgment. The prophet concludes with a ringing recall of the people to a more righteous life and in conclusion pictures a time of plenty which will come when they have become obedient.

In the remainder of the book the same prophet or another

¹ Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth* contains a description of such a visitation on the plains of the Dakotas.

presents wonderful descriptions of that great day when, amidst cataclysms of nature, the Lord will set up his kingdom on Mount Zion. From Jerusalem shall then go forth judgment for all the world, while the city itself remains the high and holy residence of God and his people. This ideal picture became more luminous as the fortunes of the Hebrew community grew darker. Here, as usually elsewhere, the element of vengeance is involved in the ideal future, for the Jews could not visualize their own salvation apart from the complete destruction of their historic enemies. Justice rather than mercy was their ideal and their prayer. It was this great dream, however, that held them together.

"It shall come to pass afterward,
That I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy;
Your old men shall dream dreams,
And your young men shall see visions.
Furthermore, upon the male and female slaves,
In those days I will pour out my spirit.

"And I will set portents in the heaven and on the earth,
Blood, and fire, and columns of smoke.
The sun shall be changed to darkness and the moon
to blood,
Before the coming of the day of the LORD,
great and terrible.
But everyone that calls upon the name of the LORD
shall be delivered;
For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be
those that escape";
As the LORD has said.
And the escaped will be those whom the LORD proclaims
[2:28-32].

.
Multitudes upon multitudes are in the valley of decision,
For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.
The sun and the moon are darkened,
And the stars withhold their brightness.

For the LORD roars from Zion,
And from Jerusalem he utters his voice;
And the heavens and the earth quake.
But the LORD is a refuge to his people,
And a stronghold to the children of Israel.

“And you shall know that I, the LORD, your God,
Am dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain.
And Jerusalem shall be holy,
And aliens shall not again pass through her.

“And it shall come to pass on that day,
That the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
And the hills shall flow with milk,
And all the river-beds of Judah shall flow with water;
And a spring shall go forth from the house of the LORD,
And water the valley of Shittim.

“Egypt shall become a waste,
And Edom shall be a barren steppe;
Because of the wrong done to the children of Judah,
In that they shed innocent blood in their land.
But Judah shall abide forever,
And Jerusalem throughout the ages.
And I will avenge their blood; I will not
leave it unpunished.”

For the LORD dwells in Zion [3:14-21].

The second, and last, of these two books of the prophets which we must discuss is that much-read and frequently unjustly derided Book of Jonah. This book in reality contains the finest gospel of the Old Testament. Jonah is the name of the hero; that of the writer is unknown. The book contains a series of imaginary incidents happening to a narrow-minded and exclusive Jew, one to whom the thought of God's beneficent interest in all other peoples as well as in Hebrews was abhorrent. The writer of the story was a *liberal* Jew who had come to see that a God who had created all the world and all peoples might be expected to be interested in all his own creation.

The hero of the little tract appears in the person of a prophet, Jonah, living back in the time of Jereboam II, in northern Israel (II Kings 14:25). Just as the authors of the Book of Daniel and the Book of Job used some traditional character, so our author picks this man for his lay figure.

Jonah, the pious Hebrew prophet, is called upon to warn the inhabitants of the foreign city of Nineveh that their wickedness has been noted by the God of the Hebrews and that they had better take notice. For some reason that does not at first appear, Jonah is dismayed at such a commission. He promptly took ship to a distant land where he thought that God could not reach him. A storm arose in which the sailors prayed to their several gods for deliverance. They urged Jonah to pray to his God also. Then, seeking to discover who among them had displeased his god, and brought this storm upon them, they cast lots. The lot fell upon Jonah. He confessed that he had offended his God by running away from him, and, since his God was the creator of the heavens, the sea, and the land, the storm was his work. After hard but unavailing efforts on the part of the sailors to reach the land, they reluctantly threw Jonah into the sea, to appease the wrath of his God of the sea, whom they then worshiped with a sacrifice and vows. Here are heathen sailors praying to Jonah's God and being saved from drowning.

The second episode is found in one verse and part of another and a sentence farther on. "Now the Lord had assigned a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God, from the belly of the fish. Then the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah forth upon the dry land." (The psalm which interrupts the story is a later addition, and we omit it.) Here we have a dis-

obedient Hebrew prophet in a hopeless predicament praying to God, who delivers him from his danger.

Upon a second command from God, Jonah, disciplined but still unchanged, obediently goes to Nineveh. His astonishing proclamation of the coming destruction of Nineveh is listened to by the king and the citizens, with the miraculous consequence that the whole city immediately repents and goes into mourning over its sins, not accused by its own gods but in obedience to Israel's God. They turn to him with cries of repentance, and he, "seeing that they have turned from their evil way," reverses his previous intention to destroy them. Thus we see three miraculous deliverances by the same God—heathen sailors, a disobedient prophet of God, and a heathen city all treated alike. What did it mean?

Poor Jonah. He, a prophet of the God who created the universe, had been thrown overboard by heathen sailors, swallowed by a great fish, and discredited in the sight of a foreign city. He angrily protested, and here we see the reason of his original reluctance, that he had known all the time that God would never carry out such a threat.

"O LORD, is not this what I said while I was still upon my own soil? Therefore I hastened to flee to Tarshish. For I knew that thou wast a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in kindness and relenting of evil. Now, therefore, O LORD, take my life, I pray thee, from me. For I am better off dead than alive!"

Then follows the delightful argument. Jonah still hoped and looked for disaster to the city. God used the sun to give him a dose of physical discomfort, under which he fainted. But God caused a miraculous gourd to grow and so saved him from the death for which he asks, but then he also created a miraculous worm to eat the gourd. Jonah, torn by his own anguish of spirit and body, is at last in a state of

mind to receive the rebuke of the Lord in the closing paragraph:

“You have had pity on the gourd, for which you did not toil; nor did you raise it; which grew in a night, and perished in a night! And should not I, indeed, have pity on Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand infants, that cannot distinguish between their right hand and their left, and many cattle?”

Could anything be more exquisitely appropriate than this rebuke to a certain type of narrow and exclusive Jew of those late days, when their attention was turned completely in upon themselves and they were forced to fight, intellectually and spiritually, for their own salvation? What wonder that they had lost sight of the needs of the rest of the world, and of God's relation to it? But, as so many times before, it was the minority thought of God which was destined eventually to prevail.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

These books, Joel and Jonah, in their brevity and singleness of purpose remind us of tracts. They are absolutely different in purpose and effect, however. The one dwells wholly upon the difference which exists between the Jews and the rest of humanity. The other reveals them as only sharers in God's mercy, which is extended to all the world alike. Thus the conservative priestly attitude and the creative prophetic spirit continue. But both have their basis in the necessity for conduct pleasing to God.

It is very profitable at this point to take a backward look, noting how many of man's theories about God had been sloughed off in the passing of the years. We can compare the ideals of God which Joel and Jonah held, different as they were from each other, with those of Abraham, Samuel, or David. We shall find that the changes which affected reli-

gion supremely, lay in the spiritualizing of the idea of God and in the broadening and deepening of the content of righteousness. The yearning for it is always present. Does that give us confidence that religion will remain a major aspect of the evolution of human society? The struggle for righteousness, sometimes obscured by the desire for power, for intellectual achievement, or for possessions, is still going on, and, like a ferment in the blood, will keep on working. Indeed, have we lost anything that was more than temporarily valuable in the passage of the years since Old Testament times? Are dogmas more than shells, to be outgrown and replaced by more appropriate homes of the soul? If so, then we must be very careful to distinguish between dogma and fact, between theology and religion.

The Book of Joel will be interesting only to adults. But Jonah, with its message, should be familiar even to children. This story has been so often the subject of mirth and silly argument, as to the size of the fish, and its general literal truth, that we owe a right understanding of its allegorical character to every child—three miraculous stories, not one, each teaching the same lesson. It is easily understood, and, prefaced by some description of the attitude of exclusiveness which characterized the religion of the times, it has a beautiful message of universality which paves the way for the message of Jesus, so soon to be heard.

One cannot help wondering how this book was received. The popularity of Joel is undoubted. Which has best stood the test of time?

CHAPTER XIX

TWO NOVELETTES

THE BOOK OF RUTH; THE BOOK OF ESTHER

TWO pleasant books, the authorship and date of which are unknown to us, bear the name of women, Ruth and Esther. One of these we can place in a general setting. The name of Ezra will bring to mind his stringent marriage laws, and the rebellion which must have arisen in many homes, as wives and husbands were separated purely on the basis of race. This same passion for purity of blood is animating some European nations today, but this time it is the Jewish blood which is deemed objectionable. Someone who refused to forego his privilege of opinion in that strenuous time gave us the Book of Ruth.

It is a charming story of the ancestry of David, another one of those delightful stories which gathered around the name of Israel's favorite king. It is a story of a little family driven from their Bethlehem home across to the hills of Moab by a famine in Judah. The father, dying there, had left a wife and two sons who married Moabitish women. These husbands, sons of Naomi, died, leaving widows. Naomi longed to return to her own country, hoping perhaps to find some kin. Ruth, the Moabitess, one of the young widows, insists for pure love's sake in accompanying her mother-in-law into Judea. There through tactful conduct she finds employment with a distant relative who assumes the privilege and responsibility of such to a widow who is kin, and marries her, although the daughter of a Moabite. Her story enacted on Hebrew soil shows her to be quite

adorable, industrious, wise, generous, and sufficiently romantic. The climax of the book is in the closing statement that the son born to Boaz and Ruth was Obed, "the father of Jesse, the father of David." Thus the ideal king, the type of that king whom the Jews hoped again to have, and to whom they likened the Messiah of their dreams, was proven to be a descendant of a "mixed marriage." This was an unanswerable argument for the legitimacy of such marriages. One wonders if Ezra ever heard the tale.

The story of Esther is a voice out of an unknown period, but probably among the latest of Old Testament books. It seeks to account for the Jewish feast of Purim, but as a story it never fails to interest young people. It must have been exceedingly popular with Hebrew youth as well, for there are now in existence a larger number of rolls containing the text of this book than any other book of the Old Testament. Many of them have even been brought to this country by travelers. Yet, if one looks for religious uses of this book, there are none, except as it portrays amid scenes of quite another color the youthful and beautiful Esther risking her life for her people. Since it makes no mention of the name of God, it's fitness to be placed among the books approved as sacred was questioned by the later Hebrews, but it was finally admitted to the sacred canon.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

These two stories are like outlines of two novels. They could be expanded indefinitely. Both link up with historical occasions. Both may be used as portrayals of types of faithful women not necessarily Jewish. They were not motivated by religion but simply by human affection and racial or family loyalty. Such qualities are always beautiful, and these stories have probably inspired many Christian as well

as Hebrew youths to greater fidelity and sacrifice. One of them might serve to augment race hatred and the other to modify it.

They both lend themselves to dramatic portrayal and have proved favorites. Even juniors love the story of Ruth, although some of the detail passes over their heads. The simple reading of it in a dialogue, which is selected below, has proven interesting to such a group.

Selections for dialogue in Ruth.—TEACHER: 1:1-8*a*; NAOMI: 1:8*b*-9*a*; TEACHER: 1:9*b*-10*a*; RUTH and ORPAH: 1:10*b*; NAOMI: 1:11*a*, 12*a*; TEACHER: 1:14; NAOMI: 1:15; RUTH: 1:16, 17; TEACHER: 1:22-2:2*a*; RUTH: 2:2*b*; NAOMI: 2:2*c*; TEACHER: 2:3, 4*a*; BOAZ: 2:4*b*; REAPERS: 2:4*c*; BOAZ: 2:5*a*; REAPERS: 2:6; RUTH: 2:7*a*; BOAZ: 2:8, 9; TEACHER: 2:10*a*; RUTH: 2:10*b*; BOAZ: 2:11, 12; RUTH: 2:13; TEACHER: 2:14*b*, 15*a*; BOAZ: 2:15*b*, 16; TEACHER: 2:17, 18; NAOMI: 2:19*b*; RUTH: 2:19*d*; NAOMI: 2:20*b*, *c*; RUTH: 2:21; NAOMI: 2:22; TEACHER: 2:23; 4:13-17.

CHAPTER XX

WHY DO THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER? A PROBLEM POEM

THE BOOK OF JOB

AT THIS point we are ready to look into one of the greatest of the books of the Bible and, indeed, of all literature, the Book of Job. Some great soul out of deep dissatisfaction with the "righteous shall prosper" theory of life states the problem through the story of a man "perfect in all his ways" who, out of bitter anguish of mind and body, dared to question the ways of God. He, too, believed that whatever came to a man was sent of God, but on what basis? Certainly, the comforts, luxuries, and prestige which men desire were not by any means always given to those who merited them. While one group was saying, "Thy ways are ways of pleasantness, and all thy paths are peace," Job said, "Not so."

But we must read this book.

A prologue and epilogue to the main drama are presented in 1:1—3:1 and 42:7—16. Through these we are introduced to Job, a righteous man possessing a large family and great wealth, in whom God takes pride because of his goodness. Satan maintains that Job is good because he is so richly blessed with health, family, and wealth. He asserts that he can make Job curse God. God avers that he cannot, but gives Satan permission to test Job, sparing only his life.

The scenes take place in heaven, where Satan converses with God, and on earth, where the man is tested. Successive catastrophes strip him of his family, possessions, friends, and

finally of health. He accepts all this in quiet submission, making no complaint. In answer to his wife's lament he says,

Should we indeed receive good from God,
And should we not receive evil?

He is quite unaware that his misfortunes are the work of Satan. But, the writer states, "in all this Job did not sin."

The epilogue continues the idea of the prologue. Job, having stood the greatest tests that Satan could devise, not even thinking of cursing God, Satan withdraws. Job's possessions are restored, and he has a greater family and more wealth than at first, and lives to a great old age. This prologue and epilogue constitute a drama in themselves and represent in action the Hebrew theology of unthinking people in the years following the exile.

The way of the wicked is hedged with thorns
But the path of the upright is paved like a highway
[Prov. 15:19].

In the house of the righteous, there is ample wealth;
But the revenue of the wicked will be cut off [Prov. 15:6].

No harm can befall the righteous;
But the lives of the wicked are full of misfortune
[Prov. 12:21].

Many students feel that prologue and epilogue were added to an old and familiar poem in order to offset the very different and, to many, inexplicable problem presented by it. It was the best solution that pious Jews, bound by a literalistic legalism, could give to such a story as that of Job, which presents not only a good man suffering but violently rebellious, for the traditionally patient Job exists only in the prologue and epilogue. As we shall now see, the Job of the poem was a very different person, one who even dares to

challenge the justice of God and finally, although awed into submission, to repudiate the current interpretation of the events of his own life and possibly of history.

Although there may have been some ancient tradition about a good man called Job, there is no reason to think of this poem as presenting a real person and real events. He was a character in a play. It is possible that he was intended as a lay figure representing the afflicted Jewish people to whom the reward of renewed righteousness seemed long delayed and at times hopeless. Where was this God whose promises had led them to hope for a brilliant future? Why did he permit their persecution and poverty? Was the struggle to preserve themselves as a separate religious community worth while? Other nations who cared nothing for God seemed to go on to greater and greater success. Whether the writer had in mind a personal or a national experience does not matter so far as the beauty of the poem is concerned, but a national significance increases its interest.

The poem opens with a desperate Job in great fear and suffering, crying out against his fate. "Perish the day wherein I was born," he says, and curses that day through three extended strophes, the core of which is Job's question.

"Why is light given to the wretched,
And life to the bitter of spirit;
Who long for death, but it comes not,
And hunt for it more than for buried treasures,
Those who would rejoice exultingly,
And would be glad, if they could find the grave?"
[3:20-22].

This long lament states the problem and gives a keen appreciation of the bitterness of Job's physical and mental suffering. In modern terms he is "down and out" and in the depths of despair. This was contrary to the rule. Misfor-

tune and physical suffering were said to be a visitation of God for sins committed. Job had not sinned.

At the fourth chapter begins a great debate between Job and three friends who claim to have come to comfort him. The first speaker, Eliphaz, is a visionary soul thoroughly loyal to God and to the current theology. He acknowledges that Job has done many good things but something must be wrong with his conduct. The speaker describes a vision in which the righteousness of God was seen to be so overwhelming that no human being could ever be quite sinless before him. Therefore, no man could escape, or should protest against, the judgments of God.

“Happy, indeed is the man whom God reproves;
So do not reject the instruction of the Almighty”
[5:17].

Then he proceeds in an airy manner to picture future prosperity which will follow the present scourge. In reply to this effort of Eliphaz, Job protests (6:1—7:21) that he at least should be told why he is suffering so bitterly since he cannot reform without knowing what his crime is. He accuses his friends of unfaithfulness, since they have not hitherto pointed out the error of his ways. He ends with an appeal to be left alone in the frightful misery which he describes, and then he turns to God.

Have I sinned? What do I unto thee,
O thou keeper of man?
Why dost thou make me a target for thyself,
So that I am become a burden to thee? [7:20].

Bildad, a second friend, is greatly shocked at Job's temerity (8:1–22). He violently reproves him and accuses Job of claiming to be a righteous person and yet speaking such impertinent words to the Almighty. Job's very attitude is

irreligious; all nature and history testify that God never completely rejects a good man.

“Verily, God will not reject a perfect man,
Nor will he lay hold of the hand of evil-doers.
He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,
And your lips with shouting.
Those who hate you will be clothed with shame;
And the tent of the wicked will not be” [8:20-22].

Poor Job finds no comfort in this. He takes up the theory of Bildad in his reply (9:1—10:22) and expresses profound reverence for God, surpassing even that of his friends. But he laments that before such perfection as that of God he could not be expected to stand as innocent. Moreover, God is so great and so perfect that man does not dare even to be allowed to ask to speak to him, in order that he may learn the reason of his affliction.

“I know that thou dost not hold me guiltless;
I am declared guilty.
Why, then, should I toil in vain?
If I should wash myself in snow,
And clean my hands with lye,
Then thou wouldst plunge me into the cesspool,
And my clothes would abhor me.
For he is not a man like myself whom I could answer,
That we could come together in the court.
O that there were an umpire between us,
That he might lay his hand upon both of us,
That he might turn aside his rod from upon me,
And that fear of him might not terrify me;
That I might speak and not be afraid of him.
For I am not so with myself” [9:28-35].

He ends in questioning the very reason for his existence and again longs to be left alone in his misery.

“Are not the days of my life few?
Let him leave me alone, that I may brighten up a little,

Before I go, never to return,
 To a land of darkness and blackness,
 A land of shadow, like gloom,
 Of blackness without order,
 And when it shines, it is like gloom" [10:20-22].

The third friend, Zophar, now speaks (11:1-20). He also avers that the judgment of God is right. He calls upon his friends to let the birds and the beasts and all living things teach him the power of God.

"But would that God might speak,
 That he might open his lips with you,
 And tell you the secrets of wisdom;
 For insight is a wonderful thing" [11:5, 6a].

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"If you would only apply your mind,
 And spread out your hands unto him!
 If iniquity be in your hand, put it far away;
 Let not perversity dwell in your tent.
 Then, indeed, you might lift up your face without blemish,
 And you would be steadfast, and would not fear"

[11:13-15].

Job is simply ignorant or he would not speak as he did. Then Zophar proceeds to exalt God and to exhort Job to put away his iniquity. Job bitterly and lengthily replies. His opening words are

"No doubt but you are the people,
 And wisdom will die with you!
 But I too have a mind as well as you,
 I am not inferior to you!
 Who has not experienced such things as these?"

[12:1-14:22].

Then Job rehearses from his experience the nature and wonder of God's activities in the world, more brilliantly than any of his friends have done.

But his is a human situation, a righteous man in contempt and despair.

'I am become 'a laughing-stock to his friend,'
One whom God answered when he called;
A laughing-stock is the righteous, the perfect one.
For the unfortunate there is contempt in the thought
of him who is prosperous,
Ready for those whose feet slip.
The households of spoilers prosper,
And those who provoke God are secure,
Those whom God brings into his power" [12:4-6].

Why can I not argue my case with God? Just because I am not an impious man I should be allowed to come before him. Then Job appeals to God, declaring his innocence and begging to be freed from the terror that possesses him, that he may talk with God about the reason of his suffering.

"See, now, I draw up my case;
I know that I am innocent.
Who is there to contend with me?
For then I would keep silence and die.
Yet two things do not do to me—
Then I will not conceal myself from before thee.
Remove thy hand from upon me,
And let not the dread of thee terrify me!
But call, and I will reply;
Or I will speak, and do thou answer me.
How many are my iniquities and sins?
Tell me my offense and my sin.
Why dost thou hide thy face,
And reckon me as thy foe?" [13:18-24].

Then a great question comes to his lips. The *tree* is cut off, but it sprouts again.

"If a man dies, does he live?
All the days of my service I would wait
Until my turn should come;

Thou wouldst call and I would answer thee;
 Thou wouldst yearn for the work of thy hands"
 [14:14-15].

But the old thought of the *power* of God overwhelms him, and he relapses into despair.

At this point the second cycle of the debate begins with the original speaker, Eliphaz (15:1-35). It is a blustering speech defending his own wisdom and assuring Job that in his rebellion he can expect nothing but punishment. One who stretches out his hand against God is destined for ruin.

Job retorts:

"Is there any end to words of wind?
 Or what provokes you that you answer?
 I too could speak like you,
 If you were in my place" [16:3-4].

He continues to rehearse his sorrows and to call upon heaven to witness that he is innocent of any past violence. Even in his thoughts he has not sinned.

"My face is flushed from weeping,
 And black shadows are on my eyelids;
 Although there is no violence on my hands,
 And my prayer is pure.
 O earth, cover not my blood,
 That there be no place for my cry.
 Yet now; lo, my witness is in the heavens,
 And he who testifies for me is on high.
 My thoughts are my intercessors;
 Unto God my eye weeps,
 That one might plead for a man with God,
 Even as with a man for one's friend" [16:16-21].

I shall die in my present misery, and who shall see this reward that is promised the righteous. I shall be in Sheol.

Bildad enters (18:1-21), protesting at the way in which

Job repudiates the doubtful comfort of his friends. Does Job expect the order of the universe to be changed on his account?

“How long will you set snares for words?
Understand, and afterward we will speak.
Why are we accounted as beasts?
Why are we stupid in your eyes?
You who tear yourself in your anger—
Is the land to be forsaken on your account,
Or the rock to be moved from its place?” [18:2-4].

Then he pictures the terrible things that happen to people who are wicked.

In response, Job (19:1-29) fairly shouts, “You wrong me shamelessly by arguing that my suffering indicates sin. God has put me where I am. Is that not sufficient when I do not know the cause? Why do you continue to pursue me?” And again he falls back on his only recourse, enumerating the miseries of his condition. He appeals to their sympathy even against their judgment:

“Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends,
For the hand of God has struck me!
Why do you pursue me like God,
And are not satisfied with my flesh?” [19:21-22].

At last he rises to an overwhelming conviction that in some way God *is* on his side.

“Would then, that my words were written!
Would that they were inscribed in a scroll!
That with an iron pen and lead
They were hewn in the rock forever!
But as for me, I know that my Vindicator lives;
And as the next-of-kin he will stand upon my dust;
And as the next-of-kin he will rise as my witness,
And I shall see God as my defender;
Whom I shall see on my side,
And my eyes will see to be no stranger” [19:23-27].

Job had fought through to a position where he no longer feels it necessary to acknowledge sin which he has not committed. Justice must be a quality of God; his God must establish the innocence of men as well as their guilt.

The speech of Zophar (20:1-29) continues in the old vein of the curse upon the wicked, who will eventually be completely terrified and impoverished by God. Job (21:1-34) promptly contradicts him, claiming that the wicked do prosper, and grow old, and amass wealth, and see their children established after them. He questions:

“How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out,
Or that their calamity comes upon them?
That he apportions snares in his anger,
That they are like straw before the wind,
Or like chaff that the whirlwind carries away?

“ ‘God stores up his trouble for his sons!’
Let him requite it unto himself that he may know,
That his own eyes may see his ruin,
And that he may drink of the wrath of the Almighty.
For what does he care about his house after him,
When the number of his months is reckoned up?”

[21:17-21].

He has seen that the righteous and the wicked die alike. The words of his friends have been futile.

Here the third round of speeches opens. The friends are worn out and irritable. Eliphaz (22:1-30) can only reiterate the certainty of Job's great wickedness and abjure him to put away his sin, offer prayers, and make suitable vows, assuring him that he will eventually be delivered from his misery. In return Job laments (23:1-24:25) that he needs only to *find* God in order to set his case before him and secure his vindication.

“O, that I knew where I might find him,
That I might come to his dwelling!

I would set my case in order before him,
And I would fill my mouth with arguments.
I would know the words he would answer me
And understand what he would say to me" [23:3-5].

Then he pictures the unrestrained devastation of the wicked, robbing, oppressing, snatching mere infants as security, like wild beasts in their prowling.

"They are enemies of the light;
They do not know its ways;
Nor do they dwell in its paths" [24:13].

Yet no one molests them. He challenges his friends to prove him wrong.

Bildad breaks out upon him (25:1-6; 26:5-14), "It is useless, Job. You cannot justify yourself with God. He who has created the heavens and earth, how can *you* talk to him?"

Job continues his own thinking, scarcely noticing Bildad's interruption. He will not justify God by confessing to wickedness which he has not committed. He will at least hold on to his innocence.

"My lips do not speak untruth,
Nor my tongue utter deceit.
Far be it from me that I should justify you;
Till I die I will not put my integrity from me.
I will hold on to my innocence and will not let it go.
My conscience does not reproach any of my days" [27:4-6].

Zophar (27:7-23) makes a last desperate effort to impress the suffering man, but fails.

At this point there follows a section of praise of wisdom (28:1-28). It breaks the continuity of thought and may have been a later insertion, but it is meant to dazzle Job. Perhaps some poet was not satisfied with the speech of

Zophar and sought to improve upon it, or perhaps this poem was inserted in the place of a lost speech of Zophar.

Job's reply (29:1—31:40) consists of sad reminiscences of his old life of prosperity and friendliness with all about him, a counselor to many; but in contrast he is overwhelmed by a sense of the present, and again he rehearses his sufferings. Now he is a byword, a loathing, dishonored, disregarded by God, every hope destroyed. He again challenges God to bring accusations against him, however trivial, but there is no response from God.

"O that one would listen to me!
Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!
And the scroll which my opponent has written—
Surely I would carry it upon my shoulder;
I would wind it around me as my diadem.
The number of my steps I would declare;
Like a prince would I present it" [31:35-37].

The speeches of Elihu, a new character in the drama, are inserted at this point (32:6) and continue through five chapters, but to him neither Job nor the three friends reply. Many students of the poem think these a later insertion by some lover of the poem, who thought he could better the argument of the three friends.

Since Elihu adds nothing to the progress of thought, we shall pass him over and go on with Job's interview with the Lord which at last is permitted. The first speech is from the Lord himself speaking from a whirlwind.

"Who is this that obscures counsel
By words without knowledge?
Gird up, now, your loins like a man,
That I may question you, and do you instruct me" [38:1-3].

He then presents a dazzling array of his power, his glory, his absolute wisdom, and asserts that his design may be discovered throughout all creation. The inference is, "Why

not in Job's life?" The poem presents no reply from Job. Perhaps he is overwhelmed. Perhaps his reply has been lost. But again God speaks, challenging Job's right to find fault with one who is almighty.

The reply from Job is humility incarnate.

"Will the fault-finder argue with the Almighty?
He who chides God, let him answer for it."

"Behold, I am insignificant;
What can I answer thee?
I put my hand over my mouth.
I have spoken once, and I will not reply;
Yes, twice; but not again" [40:1-5].

Then the Lord calls on Job to stand up before him and, in view of all the wisdom of God which he has already acknowledged, to take back his accusations.

"Gird up your loins, now, like a man;
I will ask you, and do you instruct me.
Will you, indeed, break down my right?
Will you make me guilty that you may be innocent?
Or have you an arm like God,
And can you thunder with a voice like his?
Deck yourself, now, with majesty and eminence,
And clothe yourself with glory and splendor.
Scatter abroad the rage of your wrath;
And look upon everyone that is proud and abase him.
Look upon everyone who is proud and bring him low;
And crush the wicked where they stand.
Bury them in the dust likewise;
Bind up their faces in the hidden place.
Then I indeed will praise you,
That your own right hand can deliver you" [40:6-14].

The poetic description of the hippopotamus which follows is probably a later addition. In Job's response he is at peace with God. He says:

"I know that thou canst do all things;
And no plan is too difficult for thee.

.

Therefore I have declared, without understanding,
 Things too wonderful for me, without knowing.

.

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear;
 But now my eye has seen thee.

Therefore I retract and repent,
 In dust and ashes" [42:2-6].

Out of deep and bitter experience Job (or was it Israel?), having lost his faith in an old theory about God, at last finds himself with a new sense of oneness with God. He can hold on to his close relation with him and at the same time be intellectually honest. The righteous are not *always* prosperous; those who suffer are not *always* wicked. The ways of God are past finding out, but they are his ways. The drama leaves us with a sense of the mystery of God. No longer could men accept the cut-and-dried theology of former times.

After the reading of this great poem one turns to the epilogue, which presents the then current theology. The rebuke to the friends does not greatly interest us, and when, after our sympathetic journey through his deep experience, his intellectual and spiritual agonies, and the calm triumph of his soul in submission and communion with God, we find Job in the end simply a rich, prosperous, patriarchal old man, it seems a trivial outcome. We feel thus that both the prologue and the epilogue may not have been a part of the original poem. Job's question, the question of all the ages, "Why do the righteous suffer?" was religiously met rather than answered. This was the question of the faithful Hebrews in the dark years after and during the exile, and even today.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

We have few words in which to express our appreciation of the contribution of this profound drama to the problem

literature of the world and to the realm of religious poetry. Again and again we turn to its still debatable question and its answer never complete; but in the presentation of the problem, the marshaling of evidence, and the majesty of God, we find intellectual and emotional satisfaction and solace, even also in the humble conclusion—acceptance without understanding. That is life. To the Hebrews it was the wise man's sufficient answer to the problem, "Why do the righteous suffer?" The prophet had given a different answer in his theory of the "suffering servant." The writer of this drama pleads only for the right to think and to question. When that freedom is granted, he finds peace and satisfaction. It is more satisfying to him not to know the reason of his suffering than to accept the commonplace reasoning of his friends. He prefers an unsearchable God to one whose every way is known and whose rules have all been discovered.

In these days of despotic tyrannies, this longing for freedom of the soul certainly has its message. As we look the world over, we see the experience of Job a million times repeated, and the outcry is still, "Why?" Science and the philosophy of history have answers for us which Job did not have; and the power of one and the experience gained from the other have helped us to mitigate suffering and injustice; but still there is the mystery which challenges our will to question. Only by questioning can we move forward. Is this the religious value of the Book of Job to us?

There are doubtless many people still living in various parts of the world who once listened to the reading and interpretation of Job by the late Richard G. Moulten, and remember how he thrilled them. It would be a pity not to be familiar with a poem which is said by many literary critics to be the world's greatest religious drama.

As to some practical use of this poem with pupils, an instance may be suggested. A church school under the leadership of a wise minister, and after a period of careful training of the teachers, gave a period of several weeks to the study and presentation of this drama, engaging the entire Sunday school in it. Teachers and pupils had become saturated with its dramatic character, its language and meaning.

It was presented several times, the public being invited. It was so well received that other churches invited the group to visit them and present the play, but it was never quite so effective as in the place where it was created. In the last scene God himself seemed to speak above and behind the scenes. Staging, scenery, and costumes were simple.

This was, so far as the author knows, earlier than any attempt to present the play by professionals, and its value lay in the long and careful preparatory study. Those who were finally chosen to take the parts seemed actually living in them, and all the pupils and teachers were following the action in spirit as it passed before their eyes.¹

Even young boys and girls are interested in a brief telling of this story, accompanied by short readings from the book, especially after they have become acquainted with the prophets, and their struggle to help their people to understand God, even after their greatest misfortunes had overtaken them. Perhaps the following suggestions may be useful.

Raise the question whether the pupils have ever seen any real suffering. Let them tell of cases of poverty, illness, or disaster of which they have heard. Were the people who thus suffered being punished for wrong that they had done? Here there will be difference of opinion. Recall that the Hebrew people were greatly puzzled because the good and the bad were all carried off into captivity together. They questioned, "Why do good people suffer?" One of their poets tried to answer this question by picturing a very good man in his suffering.

Read the story in the prologue, pausing between the change of scenes so that the children can follow more easily. Then review in the briefest

¹ All Souls Church, Chicago, led by the Reverend Jenkin Lloyd Jones.

way the picture of the forsaken afflicted Job sitting outside the city walls; the coming of the friends; the seven days of silent sympathy and grief; the insistence of the friends upon the fact that Job must have committed some sin for which he was suffering punishment; the continued censure of Job for his anger and sorrow at such treatment at the hand of God. Picture Job's indignant denial of sin and his appeal to God to bring some definite accusation against him, or else to cease to torment him with such suffering of mind and body. Whenever one is able to introduce the biblical language effectively, it should be used. Then describe the coming of the storm and the voice of God out of the whirlwind. Then the following may be read, simplifying only where it can be done without detriment to the majesty of the words: 38:1-11, 16-27, 34, 35, 37-41; 39:19-30; 40:3-9; 42:1-6. Add in two or three effective sentences the conclusion to Job's story as found in the epilogue, recalling that this is a *story*. Then discuss briefly: Would this poem comfort the Hebrew people in the exile? Might it comfort good people today who have great trouble? Would it make people more kindly and lead them to treat the suffering, the poor, and the unfortunate more considerately? Do people sometimes today regard people who suffer as wicked? Experiment with the class in putting into everyday language those things that one may learn about life from this book. Stimulate observation of other literature, about people who have suffered, and of other cases of submission in suffering. We cannot shelter youth from the knowledge of suffering. We *can* help them to an attitude of sympathy for or with, rather than the feeling of revolt from, sufferers which is engendered by too great protection.

CHAPTER XXI

ASSURANCES IN DISGUISE: DREAMS AND VISIONS

THE BOOK OF DANIEL

THE political history in the third and the second century B.C. is important as a background for our next book, which has heretofore commanded wide interest. Its stories, especially those of Daniel, who faced the lions, and the three men who endured the fiery furnace, are great favorites and rightly so. The Book of Daniel, however, assumes a new importance when we see in it examples of a method of secrecy to which the Jews resorted in a period of desperate danger.

The goal of rulers of empire was still the control of both Egypt and western Asia. But the Asiatic empire had been for some time dominated by the Greek Macedonia.

In 198 B.C. Palestine fell into the hands of Antiochus III, who, on the whole, treated the Jews rather kindly, but, as a matter of fact, the situation had great difficulties. The dream of Alexander had been not only a world-empire but a world-civilization which, of course, included religion. The Jews, because they held together as a religious unit, could not keep out of political issues which affected their religious practices, and, from the point of view of the empire, they constituted a menace. Attempts to break up the religious unity of any group was not therefore mere cruelty. Although periods of tension came under Antiochus III, it was not until his son Antiochus IV came to the throne that the Hellenistic party grew stronger, and the Jews suffered great indignities.

In Jerusalem the conditions were complicated by the existence of two Jewish parties. One might be called orthodox, holding that the high priest was the supreme authority in the community and the Jewish law the only absolute rule of conduct. A more liberal party recognized the governor, holding an appointment from the king, as supreme. There was inevitable disagreement among the Jews themselves, for the liberal, or so-called Hellenistic, Jews had felt the influence of Greek culture and favored a more lenient attitude toward certain of the Greek ideas and practices. The "pious ones," on the other hand, demanded absolute adherence to the ancient Jewish law. The friction between these two groups was at times great, the modernists usually favoring the political government. At one time Jason, a liberal, but the brother of the high priest, who happened to be temporarily absent from Jerusalem, usurped the office of high priest and actually asked permission to establish a gymnasium on Greek lines in Jerusalem. He also attempted to have his fellow-Jews registered as citizens of Antioch. In his position of influence, he brought many Jews to Greek ways of thinking and conducting themselves. The orthodox Jews, in this crisis, bitterly resented the appointment of a new high priest while the former one was still living, and especially one who favored Hellenism. After this, even the high priesthood was bandied about, and the result was frequently offensive to the orthodox party. The Jews were, from the point of view of the political ruler, counted as rebels, and great cruelties were perpetrated as punishment. Antiochus IV pursued them with fanatical ardor. He forbade the observance of the Sabbath and the practice of circumcision, to which all Jews were committed according to their law. Worship in the temple was outlawed, the temple itself damaged and desecrated, scripture rolls destroyed, and a statue

of Zeus erected on its very altar. Portions of city walls were thrown down, and a fortress overlooking the temple inclosure built. Heathen altars were set up throughout the city, and swine's flesh was required to be offered upon them. Disobedience meant death.

Under such impossible conditions as these, many Jews may have concealed or denied their faith to save their lives, for, of those who remained faithful, many were killed. A revolt was started by a Jew named Mattathias and his five sons, living in the village of Modein. It spread rapidly, and some remarkable early successes were achieved. Again a confident hope appeared that God was about to step in and save his followers.

Having now some appreciation of the world-situation so familiar to the Jews of this period, we shall certainly expect to find it reflected in their religious thought as expressed in their literature, and we shall appreciate the heroism of its writers, in their struggle to hold fast to God, and to encourage their fellow-Jews to do the same.

Let us now examine the Book of Daniel, possibly written about 165 B.C., amidst such conditions as we have described. The author is inaccurate in historical data of earlier Jewish history. His aim was not historical but religious. His language is partly Aramaic rather than Hebrew. He uses a lay figure from the past, as did so many biblical writers. A great name from the past would give authority to his writings, and he was confident that what he said would have been approved by the ancient worthy whom he chose. At the same time his meaning would not be understood by non-Jews into whose hands his message might fall.

The author begins with an old story of the early captivity, hundreds of years behind him in Babylon. Four noble Jewish youths among the Hebrew captives had been select-

ed for training for service at the king's palace. They refused to be tempted by "heathen" delicacies, the eating of which was contrary to the Jewish law, probably preserving their health by so doing. Handsome and able, they rose high in the favor of the king, especially one Daniel, who with his three friends demonstrated superiority by becoming wiser than all the magicians and enchanters in the kingdom (one is reminded of the Joseph story familiar to the Hebrews). Among the wise men called upon to interpret a dream of the king was Daniel. None were able to give an interpretation, but Daniel tactfully (again suggesting Joseph) asked the angry and threatening king for time. Failure to satisfy the king would mean death for all. The four praying youths were said to have been blessed that night with an interpretation of the dream from God himself. On the following day Daniel asked for an audience with the king and addressed him, asserting that the interpretation which he would give was direct from "God in the heavens who reveals secrets" (Dan. 2:28). The dream with its interpretation follows in the same chapter. It is a carefully veiled review of history from Nebuchadnezzar to Antiochus, but a disastrous ending is presented as prophecy in the mouth of Daniel.

"You, O king, looked, and lo! there was a great image. This image, which was of vast size and surpassing brightness, stood before you; and its appearance was terrible. As for that image, its head was of fine gold, its breast and arms were of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron, and partly of clay. You looked till you saw a stone hewn from a mountain without hands, which smote the image on its feet of iron and clay, breaking them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were broken in pieces together, and became like chaff from summer threshing-floors, and were carried away by the wind, so that no trace of them could be found; while the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, filling all the earth. This was the dream, and we will tell the king the interpretation of it.

"You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of the heavens has given the kingdom, the power, the strength, and the glory, and into whose hand he has put the children of men, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air, wherever they dwell, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. After you shall arise another kingdom, inferior to you; then a third kingdom, of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron; for as iron breaks in pieces and beats down all things, and as iron crushes all things, so shall it break in pieces and crush. And as you saw the feet and toes partly of potter's clay, and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom; there shall be something of the firmness of iron in it, as you saw iron mixed with muddy clay; but as the toes of the feet were partly iron, and partly clay, the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly brittle. As you saw iron mixed with muddy clay, they shall mix together in marriage; but they shall not hold together, as iron does not mix with clay. In the days of those kings the God of the heavens shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people; it shall break in pieces and annihilate all these kingdoms, but it shall stand forever, as you saw how a stone was hewn from a mountain without hands, which broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God makes known to the king what shall be in the future; the dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and prostrated himself before Daniel, and commanded sacrifice and soothing odors to be offered to him. And the king spoke to Daniel, saying,

"Truly, your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings; and he is a revealer of secrets, inasmuch as you have been able to reveal this secret."

Then the king promoted Daniel, and gave him many great gifts; he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. At Daniel's request, the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in charge of the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel remained at the gate of the king [2:31-49].

It was an assurance to the Jews that their history had been God-ordained and that disaster was close upon their oppressors. In the story it satisfied the king who, probably

unable to recall his own dream with any clarity, would see his own as the everlasting empire.

The story continues in the still faraway past. Daniel is promoted to be ruler of Babylon, and his three friends are rewarded by gifts and great appointments. Of course, secular history knows nothing of all this. It is a story. But how comforting it was in those days of persecution, and how the faithful Jews would exult in its closing assurance of the complete destruction of all nations save *one* which should endure forever. To them it was as a revelation of God.

Another story is placed in the days of the same Nebuchadnezzar (chap. 3). Faithful Hebrew young men are now pictured as refusing to bow down and worship a golden image of Nebuchadnezzar. The punishment of death in a fiery furnace is meted out to them, but they are miraculously saved, the flames leaving them untouched, a heavenly personage even appearing with them in the midst of the fire. Their God is then honored by the king, and they themselves rewarded.

Yet again (chap. 4), King Nebuchadnezzar is disturbed by a dream. Daniel is summoned (now called by the name of the king's god Belteshazzar), and he interprets. He predicts the loss of the King's reason for a time. His word is immediately fulfilled, and the event is described; but with returning reason Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges and worships Daniel's God.

Now it is Belshazzar, the king (chap. 5), son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar, who desecrates vessels of the temple which had been carried from Jerusalem to Babylon, with the captives. He used them at a great secular feast as common drinking bowls, at the same time paying tribute to the gods of Babylon. Suddenly a hand appeared writing upon the wall. No man present could read the writing. The wise

man Daniel is summoned, and his interpretation of the words spells death for the king as a punishment for his wanton desecration of the sacred cups and bowls. Naïvely enough in the story the king rewards Daniel for his devastating speech, with clothing and jewelry, and made him the third ruler in the kingdom. But Belshazzar died that night.

Under still another king, Darius, Daniel is exalted above all his fellow-rulers (chap. 6). In their jealousy they secured the passing of a law to which they knew that Daniel could not be loyal and at the same time faithful to his religion. (A situation exactly similar to that of the Jews under Antiochus.) Daniel, thrown to the lions, is miraculously protected by his God, and the king made a new decree requiring reverence to Daniel's God. Greater honors than before are heaped upon Daniel.

There may have been some ancient hero named Daniel about whose name stories had gathered, but these stories seem so definitely aimed at comforting the Jews and keeping them faithful in the terrible years which we have described that we cannot fail to see their purposeful character. The remainder of the book consists of visions clear to the persecuted Jews as veiled descriptions of persons and events with which they were familiar, and especially encouraging to those who remained faithful to the Jewish law, for all these historical events are represented to be the result of the direct action of the God of the Jews. We shall not examine them in detail, but the reader is urged to review them, with the principles pointed out in mind.

This new type of literature became strong amidst terrible persecution and is called "apocalyptic." It usually presents some résumé of the past, placed in the mouth of an ancient prophet, who announces it as in the future. It also uses

superhuman characters, as "the venerable one,"¹ Gabriel, Michael the Archangel, and sometimes impossible beasts. Frequently, the future is associated with some great cataclysm, which involves not only nations but the universe itself. Many Jews of this period had come to feel that the great kingdom and the righteous ruler of their dreams were not of this world-order. But they were nonetheless confident that they would be fulfilled. Their God was the creator of the universe, and with him all things were possible.

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

In this book we have found a new type of literature. Other apocalyptic works survive, such as the books of Enoch, the Twelve Patriarchs, the Book of Noah—a dozen or more, and one, the Book of Revelation, found a place in the New Testament. The production of such veiled comment, interpretation of the past, and brilliant pictures of the future, must have required great ingenuity, as well as literary skill. To us it seems extravagant and mysterious.

From the Book of Daniel, however, we can glean for our purposes in religious education, stories of bravery, fidelity, the spirit of martyrs—all out of a single historical background of memory of the Jews in Babylon. Were the stories true? No. But because they help us to see the way in which the persecuted Jews used them to keep up their courage and hope, they are extremely interesting. With equal assurance, we tell stories of modern unreal characters, in our education of youth. We must also remember that stories of miraculous interventions of God were not so unreal to the Hebrews as they are to us today.

¹ 7:9, 10; 8:16; 12:1.

CHAPTER XXII

THE GREAT HYMN BOOK; MINOR POETRY

THE SONG OF SONGS; THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS; THE PSALMS

WE NOW have left for consideration three collections of poetry. Two of these are of little or no importance from the point of view of religious education, and we dismiss them with brief consideration.

The Book of Lamentations is a collection of dirges containing outcries over fallen Jerusalem and the desolated nation. It is of unknown date (probably some of it not long after Jerusalem's fall) and of unknown authorship. Although some have attributed it to Jeremiah, it does not represent his literary style or his prophetic genius.

The Song of Songs presents a collection of marriage lyrics such as it is supposed were sung during the festivities accompanying a wedding. They have been arranged in a sort of progression so that, with not a little success, people have tried to read them as a drama in which King Solomon is prevented from adding to his harem a beautiful maiden who refuses to break her ties with a rustic lover. In any case, the Songs come to a real climax in the stanza apostrophizing love.

Under the apple tree I awakened you,
 where your mother was in travail with you,
 where she that bore you was in travail.
Place me like a seal upon your heart,
 like a seal upon your arm;
For love is as mighty as death,
 as strong as Sheol;

As for passion, its bolts are bolts of fire,
furious flames;

Many waters cannot quench love,
nor rivers overcome it.

If one were to offer all the substance of his house for love,
it would be utterly contemned [8:5b-7].

Such notes of chastity and pure human love are struck many times in Proverbs as in 5:1-23. These are words of the wise men, whose interest was in personal matters, and what could be more natural than that from this same source we should have the contribution of the Song of Songs to the problem of love and marriage. However, the Song of Songs was included in the sacred canon only after long debate. Even then the reading of it by youth under thirty years of age was not encouraged by the Hebrews. In Christian times an attempt was made to interpret it as an allegory of Christ and the church, and in the King James Version superscriptions to that effect may still be found.

The third collection of songs is one which might call for long and detailed treatment did the limitations of space and purpose permit. The Psalms has been the most widely read book of the Old Testament. Because of its lyric character, it has moods which fit many human needs today as perfectly as when new. The whole gamut of human emotions—love, hope, devotion, joy, prayer, praise, as well as exultation, sorrow, despair, and revenge—is represented.

Since, however, we have maintained the principle of approaching the biblical literature through the medium of personalities, we find ourselves unable to make great headway with the Psalter on that basis. We can, however, always visualize the temple courts, the thronging people, the religious festivals, the pilgrimages with these old songs upon the lips of worshipers, and even the Hebrew mother croon-

ing a psalm as she lulled her infant to sleep. The universal lyric character of the Psalms, without historical reference, allows us to give only a few suggestions for humanizing the collection, and some of the individual psalms.

The book today contains five collections. In all probability no psalms have been added since 100 B.C. Not that people did not write psalms after that, for the "Psalms of Solomon" is a title given to a later group and the "Psalms of the Pharisees" were still later. The five collections are still distinguished as Book I (Psalms 1-41), Book II (Psalms 42-72), Book III (Psalms 73-89), Book IV (Psalms 90-106), and Book V (Psalms 107-50). Whether this was the order in which they arose, we cannot be sure, but it is possible.

The name of David is attached to a majority of the psalms in the oldest collection. This suggests that to David belongs the honor of initiating a collection of "Songs for Worship" and in all probability of contributing to it. Some of the purest poetry is to be found in this early collection. We have already seen, as in the traditional Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and in the Solomonic authorship of the Proverbs, that a personal name may mean only what might be called a class distinction.

We shall enjoy the Psalms more if we keep in mind the principle of parallelism in Hebrew poetry which we have already seen illustrated. The parallelism of the Psalms is usually more irregular than that of much of the literature of the wise but is still easily discoverable. But we are chiefly interested in the meaning and religious value of the Psalms. Since none of them is less than two thousand years old, their relative age does not matter. They have served as the vehicle of religious feeling for many generations, in Hebrew and Christian times, and some of them still surpassing

modern hymns entitle unknown Hebrew poets to be called the authors of the world's greatest religious lyric poetry. (We have already given to the Hebrews the credit for the world's greatest dramatic poem—Job.) Test this statement by the following, extolling the dignity of man and the glory of God:

O LORD, our Lord,
How glorious is thy name in all the earth!
Thou whose praise is sung to the heavens,
From the mouths of babes and infants.
Thou hast established strength because of thine enemies,
To still the enemy and the revengeful.

When I see thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
The moon and the stars which thou hast formed;
What is man that thou shouldst think of him,
And the son of man that thou shouldst care for him?

Yet thou hast made him but little lower than God,
And dost crown him with glory and honor!
Thou makest him ruler over the works of thy hands,
Thou has put all things under his feet:

All sheep and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field;
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
That traverse the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Lord,
How glorious is thy name in all the earth [Psalm 8].

We are already devoted to the Twenty-third Psalm. We have seen to it that every child in a Christian home is familiar with it. There are others which deserve equal attention.

It helps us, however, to bring reality into our appreciation if we do a little speculating as to possible occasions of special inspiration. We have already noticed the appropriateness

of Psalm 24, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates," to the bringing of the Ark into Jerusalem. We have also suggested in an earlier chapter that Psalms 46, 47, and 48 seem to fit into the spirit of that great day of relief, when, after long terror in the city of Jerusalem, the Assyrian army disappeared, and shouts of rejoicing rang out in the temple courts and in the streets of the city.

God is our refuge and strength,
A well-proved help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth totter,
And the mountains topple into the heart of the sea;
Though its waters roar and foam,
Though the mountains quake at its uproar.

Selah

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of
God,
The holiest habitation of the Most High;
God is in the midst of her; she will not totter;
God will help her at break of dawn.
The nations roar; the kingdoms totter;
He utters his voice—the earth melts.
The LORD of Hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our high tower.

Selah

Come, see the deeds of the LORD,
How he has wrought ruin in the earth!
He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth;
He breaks the bow and cuts off the lance;
He burns the chariots.
Be still, and know that I am God;
I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the
earth
The LORD of Hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our high tower [Psalm 46].

Selah

O all peoples, clap your hands!
 Shout to God with a glad voice!
 For the LORD, most high, is terrible,
 A great king over all the earth.
 He subjected peoples under us,
 And put nations under our feet.
 He chose our possession for us,
 The pride of Jacob whom he loved.

Selah

God went up with a shout,
 The LORD with the sound of the trumpet.

Sing praises to God, sing praises!
 Sing praises to our king, sing praises!
 For God is king over the whole earth.
 Sing praises with a *maskil*.
 God rules over the nations;
 God sits upon his holy throne.
 The nobles of the peoples are assembled
 With the people of the God of Abraham.
 For the shields of the earth belong to God;
 He is highly exalted [Psalm 47].

.

Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised,
 In the city of our God, his holy hill.
 Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth
 Is the hill of Zion in the far north,
 The city of the great king.
 God, in her palaces,
 Has shown himself a tower of strength.

For lo, the kings conspired together,
 And they became enraged.
 They saw; thereupon they were amazed;
 They were overwhelmed, they fled in terror.
 Panic seized them there,
 Anguish as of one in travail.
 By an east wind
 Thou didst shatter the ships of Tarshish.

As we have heard, so have we seen,
In the city of the LORD of Hosts,
In the city of our God—
God establishes her forever.

Selah

We have pondered upon thy goodness, O God,
In the midst of thy temple.
As thy name, O God, so also thy praise
Reaches the ends of the earth.
Thy right hand is full of righteousness.

Let Mount Zion rejoice,
Let the daughters of Judah exult,
Because of thy judgments.
Encircle Zion and walk around her;
Count her towers;
Set your mind upon her wall;
Go through her palaces;
That you may tell the next generation
That such is God,
Our God forever and ever.
He will guide us until death [Psalm 48].

The following has widened religious horizons and made innumerable souls feel safe in an impersonal universe.

He who dwells under the shelter of the Most High,
Who abides under the shadow of the Almighty,
Says of the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress,
My God, in whom I trust."

For he rescues you from the snare of the fowler,
From the deadly pestilence;
With his pinions he covers you,
And under his wings you find refuge.
His faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

You will not be afraid of the terror by night,
Nor the arrow that flies by day,
Nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
Nor the plague that wastes at noonday.

A thousand may fall at your side,
And ten thousand at your right hand;
But it will not come near you.
You will but gaze upon with your eyes
And see the reward of the wicked.

Because you have made the LORD your refuge,
And the Most High your habitation,
No disaster will befall you,
Nor calamity come near your tent.

For he will give his angels charge over you,
To guard you in all your ways.
They will bear you up upon their hands,
Lest you strike your foot upon a stone.
Upon the lion and the adder you may tread;
Upon the young lion and the dragon you may trample.

Because he clings fast to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will set him on high because he knows my name.
When he calls upon me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will set him free and honor him.
With long life will I satisfy him,
And show him my salvation [Psalm 91].

In how many Christian churches today do these old
Hebrew paeans of praise go up?

Come, let us sing unto the LORD;
Let us raise joyful shouts to the rock
of our deliverance!
Let us come before his face with thanksgiving;
Let us raise joyful shouts to him in psalms.

For the LORD is a great God,
And a great king over all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth;
The summits of the hills are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it;
And his hands formed the dry land.

Come, let us worship and bow down;
 Let us kneel before the LORD, our maker!
 For he is our God;
 And we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep
 of his hand [Ps. 95:1-7].

.
 Hail the LORD joyously, all the earth!
 Serve the LORD with gladness!
 Come before him with joyful song!
 Know that the LORD is God!
 He made us, and his we are,
 His people and the sheep of his pasture.
 Come into his gates with thanksgiving.
 And into his courts with praise!
 Give thanks to him; bless his name!
 For the LORD is good; his kindness is everlasting;
 And his faithfulness endures throughout the ages
 [Psalm 100].

The plea of the penitent (Psalm 51) has been long associated with David's loss of his child, the son of Bathsheba. But it has served equally to voice the penitence of thousands, with its

Create for me a clean heart, O God;
 And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

The liturgical character of the Psalms is well illustrated by one which was probably sung upon appropriate feast days.

Sing joyously of God our strength;
 Shout aloud of Jacob's God.
 Raise the chant and beat the drum,
 Both the pleasant harp and the lute.
 Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
 At the full moon on our festal day.
 For it is a statute in Israel,
 An ordinance of Jacob's God.
 He made it a decree in Joseph,
 When he went forth against the land of Egypt.

I heard an unknown tongue saying,
"I removed the burden from upon his shoulder;
His hands were freed from the heavy basket.
In trouble you called and I rescued you;
I answered you in the secret place of thunder;
I tested you by the waters of Meribah" [Ps. 81:1-8].

Selah

or this

Hallelujah!
Praise God in his sanctuary!
Praise him in his mighty firmament!
Praise him for his mighty deeds!
Praise him for his abundant greatness!
Praise him with the blast of the horn!
Praise him with lyre and lute!
Praise him with drum and dance!
Praise him with strings and pipe!
Praise him with clanging cymbals!
Praise him with crashing cymbals!
Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!
Hallelujah! [Psalm 150].

The so-called Songs of Ascents (120-34) form an interesting group. According to tradition, these were sung on the pilgrimages to Jerusalem to attend the sacrificial feasts. One wonders if Jesus sang these familiar words with a swelling heart, on his first trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem, at the age of twelve years.

I raise my eyes to the hills;
whence does my help come?
My help is from the LORD,
who made the heavens and the earth.

He will not let your foot slip,
your guardian will not slumber.
He will neither slumber, nor sleep,
he that guards Israel.

The LORD is your guardian;
the LORD is your shade upon your right hand.
By day the sun will not smite you,
nor the moon by night.

The LORD will guard you from all evil;
the LORD will guard your life.
The LORD will guard your goings and comings
henceforth and forever [Psalm 121].

And this:

I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the LORD."
Our feet are standing
Within your gates, O Jerusalem;
Jerusalem that is rebuilt like a city,
Which is reconsolidated;
Whither the tribes go up,
The tribes of the LORD—
It is a decree for Israel—
To give thanks to the name of the LORD;
For there were set thrones of judgment,
The thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem;
They will prosper who love you.
Peace be within your walls,
Prosperity in your palaces!
For the sake of my brethren and my friends,
I will say, "Peace be within you!"
For the sake of the house of the LORD, our God,
I will seek your good [Psalm 122].

The Psalter was the hymn book of the worshipers in the temple at Jerusalem after the return when the Jews in Jerusalem were held together only by the bonds of a religious community, and the same hymns formed a bond of union reaching out from this center to all Jews everywhere; even today they unite Jews throughout the world. But

Christianity also has taken over into its own thinking much of the language and religion of the Psalter, because it is so personal and yet so universal in character. One needs only a belief in God to fit one to enter into its most exalted moods. It nonetheless reflects every stage of religious development through which the Hebrews passed.¹ Some of its songs are even violent expressions of the spirit of holy revenge which it was expected that God would mete out to the persecutors of the Jews, such as Psalm 137.

By the rivers of Babylon,
 There we sat down, and wept,
 When we remembered Zion.
 Upon the poplars, in the midst of her,
 We hung up our harps.
 For there our captors
 Demanded of us songs,
 And our tormentors, mirth:
 "Sing us some of the songs of Zion."

How could we sing the songs of the LORD
 In a foreign land?

¹ The following are characteristic in form and themes: *The Psalter as a Hymnal*: antiphonal choirs, 24, 136; musical terms, 5, 6, 9, 16, 22; pilgrim songs, 120-34; praise songs, 100, 138, 145, 146-50; special occasions, 105:1-15; 96, 106. *The Cry of the Psalmist*: out of need, 6, 13, 22, 51, 73. *Piety and Righteousness versus Prosperity and Wickedness*: 1, 7, 15, 30, 92. *The Righteous Must Be Established and the Wicked Punished*: 2, 11, 14, 21, 24, 40, 44, 55, 62, 69, 75, 79, 84, 109. *Communion with God*: 6, 8, 10:1-12, 16, 17, 18, 27, 42, 43, 77, 86, 90, 102, 142. *Rewards of Communion*: sense of security, 3, 33, 55, 121; satisfaction in loving-kindness, 63, 81, 106; joy and fellowship, 16; sense of forgiveness, 130. *Praises from the Individual Heart*: 9, 19, 32, 42, 65, 96, 97, 98, 111-17, 124, 126, 136. *God the Deliverer*: 13, 20, 27, 34, 36, 37, 42, 46, 60, 91, 104, 130. *The Vindication of the Righteous*: demanded by the character of God, 66, 74; can the dead praise God? 88; God's choice of the righteous, 4, 6, 15, 23-26, 30, 34, 41, 46-48, 52, 56, 80, 103. *Faith and Trust*: history and experience confirm it, 2, 10, 25, 77, 90. *God in Nature*: daily phenomena of the heavens, 19; storms, 29; world of waters, 93; place of man, 8, 57.

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
May my right hand fail me!
May my tongue cleave to my palate,
If I do not remember you;
If I set not Jerusalem
Above my highest joy!

Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites,
The day of Jerusalem!
They who said, "Raze it, raze it,
To its very foundations!"
O daughter of Babylon, destructive one,
Blessed be he who requites to you
The treatment that you dealt out to us!
Blessed be he who seizes your little ones,
And dashes them to pieces upon a rock!

SUMMARY AND LEGITIMATE INFERENCES

These books of poetry which we have inherited from our religious ancestors remind us of the universality of human experience and the continual changing of points of view in the field of religion. The Hebrew literature of mourning and that of human love has perhaps been excelled in later times. But in the expression of religious problems, and religious feeling, the Hebrew leads us still. Some attempts have been made in recent years to write psalms, but they do not rise to the level of those contained in the Bible. To go through the whole collection slowly, day by day, psalm by psalm, thoughtfully examining each and wondering what personal or national circumstances inspired it, is not only a valuable exercise in literary appreciation but a deep emotional experience as well.

The use of the Psalms for memory work in religious education is strongly recommended. While these great lyrics voice the common experience of adult religion, and for such perhaps need no historical setting, the attention of youth

may be attracted to them by giving occasions such as those which have been suggested. The language cannot, it is true, be fully apprehended in youthful experience, but, planted in the memory, its emotional urge becomes more potent as the years bring experience. Moreover, boys and girls love to memorize and recite. One little girl, when asked to tell why she recited the Twenty-fourth Psalm as if she loved it, said, "Oh, it sounds so nice." Her face showed that she was stirred with feeling that she could not express. The psalm had previously been presented as a climax to the story of the installation of the Ark in Jerusalem. Children are entitled to the joy of selections to be memorized which "sound nice."

Many short passages can be selected—portions of psalms. The mind may be stored with a convenient phraseology which rises to meet occasions unanticipated and unknown, yet universal in human experience. This, perhaps, is ancient doctrine and not intended to supersede any proved principle of religious education. But neither should it be ignored. The meagerness of our demands upon the memorizing capacity of youth has brought a paucity of religious vocabulary and natural religious expression which is, at least, regrettable.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN CONCLUSION

WE HAVE now considered in an orderly manner all the books of the Old Testament. We have approached each book with an open mind, eager to feel ourselves living in the person of each of its authors and compilers. We have tried to face their problems, feeling the limitations of their times and their ideas. We have watched the dawn of new light and clearer insight into the character of God and the conduct of man, letting the vivid emotions of these persons play upon our own; and, most important of all, we have found ourselves sharing in their zeal for God. That is what carries over. Many of the problems of the prophets have been solved by time. Other religious leaders have made and are making their contributions to religious thought. But the makers of the Old Testament, whether as authors, compilers, or simply as heroes, have contributed imperishably to the religious heritage of the race—an inheritance into which we can only fully enter when we are willing to read for ourselves, with a sympathetic and intelligent understanding of the human beings who have entered into its creation.

We have also come to see that as a religious guide the Bible has its limitations. The mere presence of a statement in the Bible is not a guaranty of its validity today, or of its fitness for use in religious education. The Bible itself gives us a basis of judgment. The writers of the Book of Deuteronomy faced that question. They said, in effect, "When the oracle of a prophet does not come true, you will know

that it was not an oracle of God"; and, of course, the opposite would follow, "When what the prophet says comes to pass, you will know that the spokesman was a true prophet" (see Deut. 18:13-22). We laugh and say that that was certainly a safe rule. But it is simply the principle that life is a great experiment, and what is wrought out in the experience of the race remains as our guide for the future. Religious beliefs and standards which prove their own validity and usefulness are to be cherished, at least until some greater and more comprehensive truth replaces them. Human beings are made for thinking. In thinking they live. In blind, unthinking acceptance or rejection they spiritually stagnate.

In our use of the Bible, therefore, our understanding of it must be historical, our appreciation both literary and historical, and our acceptance and teaching of its ideals and truths confirmed in racial and individual experience. Approached in such a spirit, it will command our profound interest and devotion. We shall indeed find it inspired by the spirit of God, acting in and through great souls co-working with him, and rising to great heights of spiritual communion with him.

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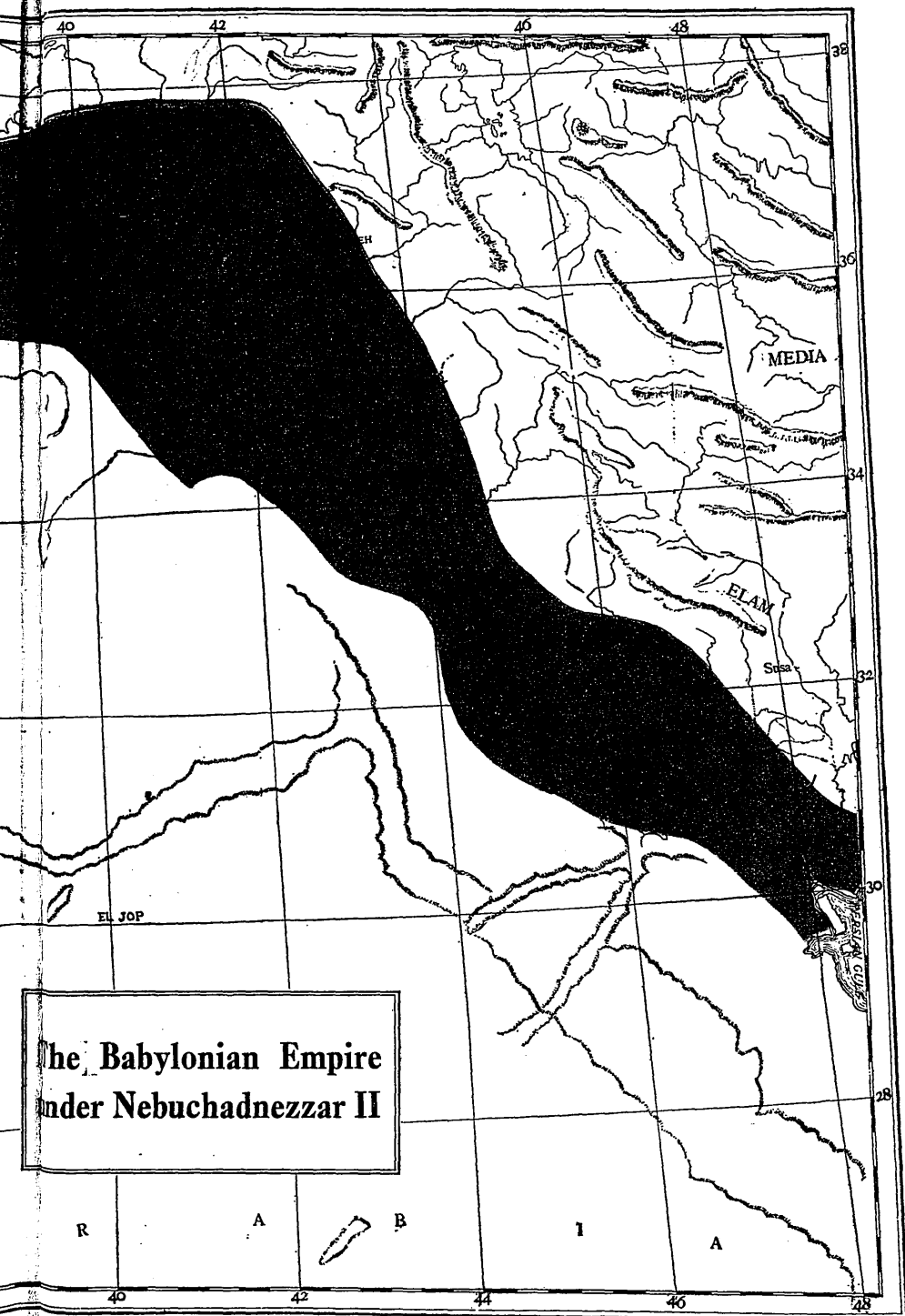
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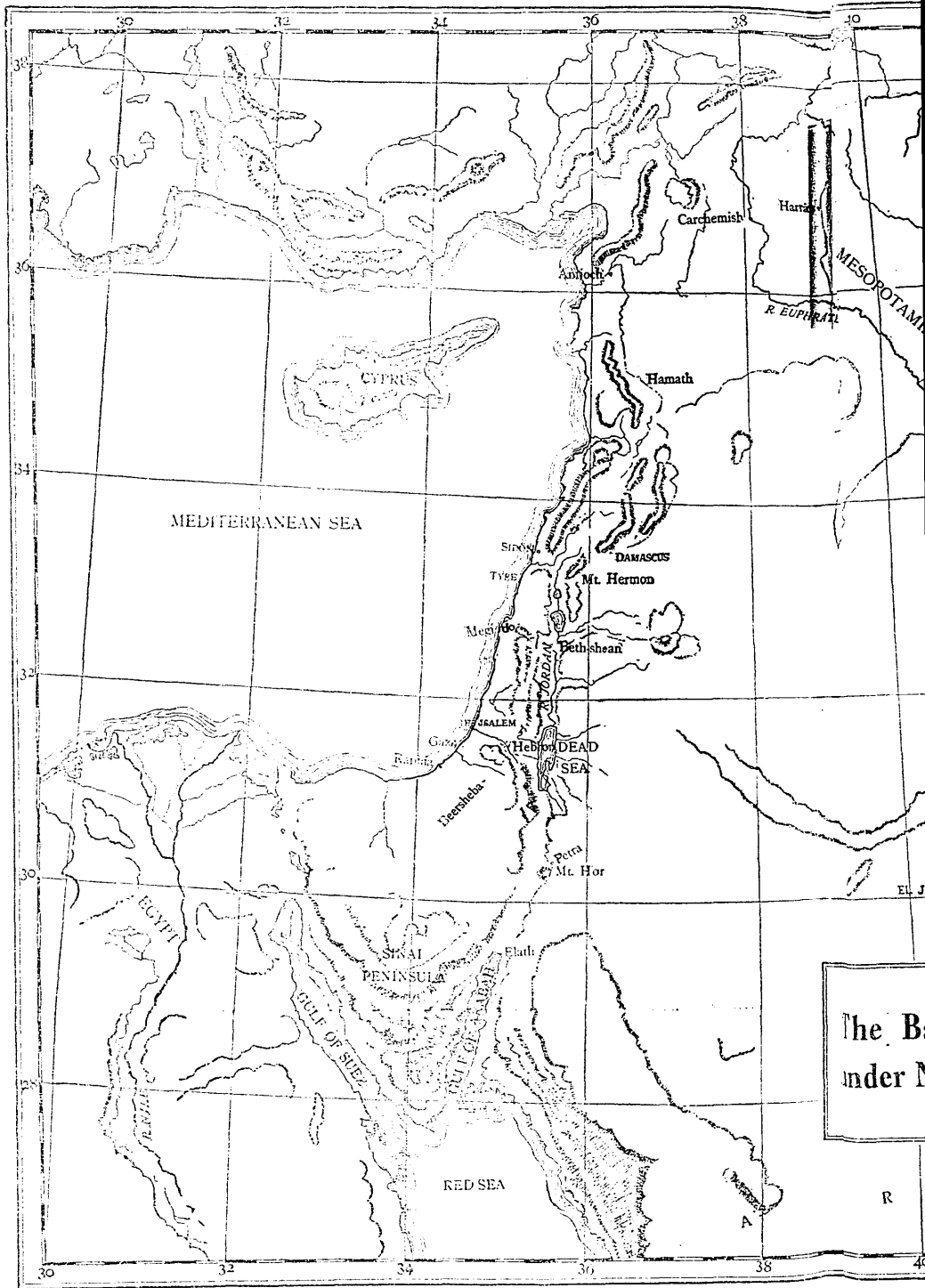
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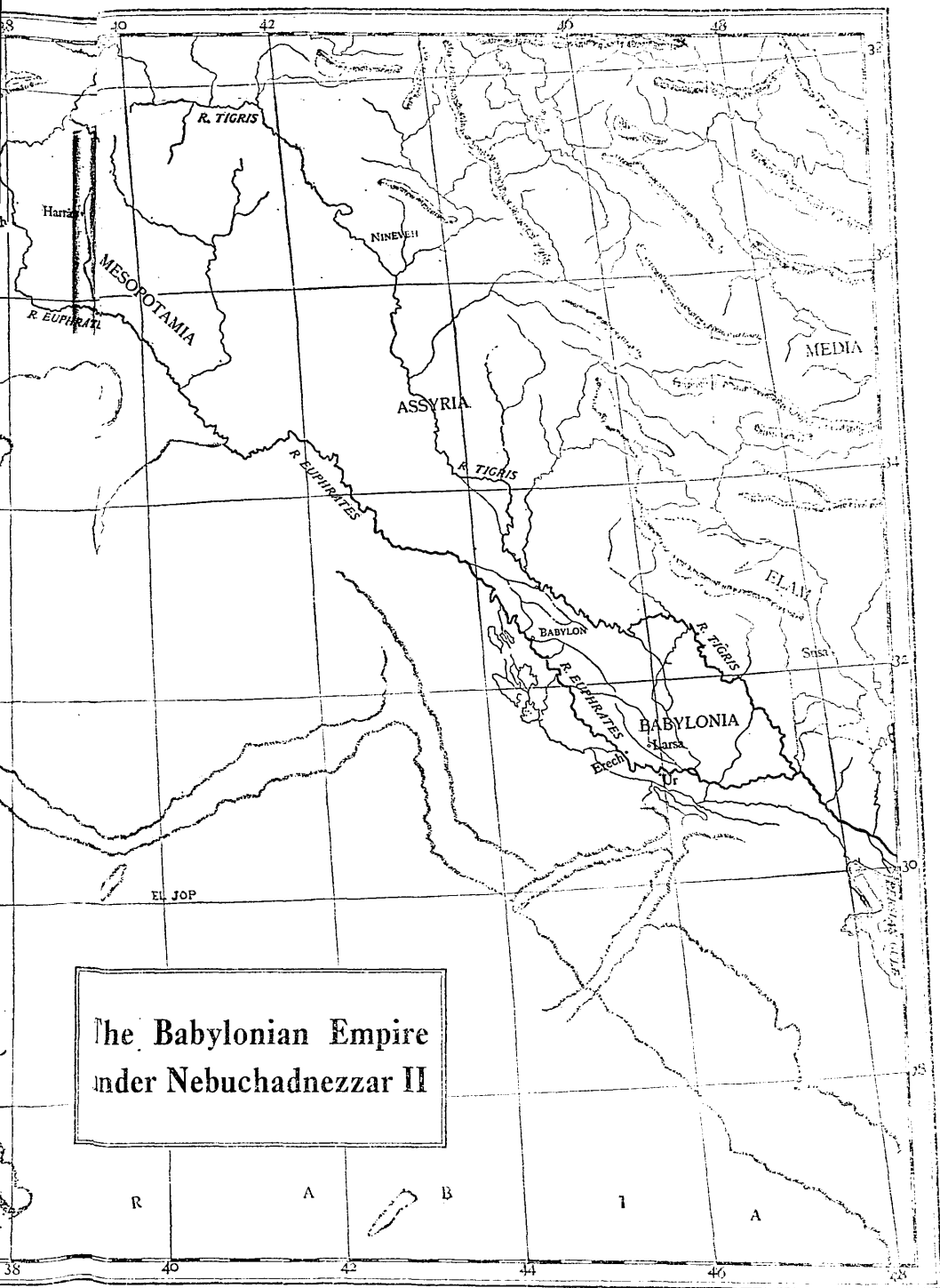
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